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ABSTRACT

This document consists of the three 2000 issues of The Bernard van Leer Foundation's "Early Childhood Matters." This periodical, addressed to practitioners in the field of early childhood education, evolved from an in-house publication directed to projects funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation. Articles in the February 2000 edition include: (1) "Laying the Foundation" (Caroline Arnold); (2) "Ready to Talk: Explorations in Nicaragua and Venezuela (Jim Smale); (3) "The Voices of Children" (Carmen Vasquez de Velasco); and (4) "Philosophy for Children in Action: Iceland" (Ingibjorg Sigurthorsdottir). The June 2000 issue focuses on parents and early childhood development programs. The articles include: (1) "Parent Participation: What's It About?" (Judith L. Evans); (2) "The Netherlands: Experienced Mothers Are the Key" (Yvonne de Graaf, Bert Prinsen, Mieke Vergeer); (3) "Canada: Parents and Children Together--The Development of the Oshki-Majahitowiin Head Start Programme" (Rachel Lawrenchuk, Carol D.H. Harvey, and Mark Berkowitz); and (4) "Kenya: In the Enclosure" (Joanna Bouma). Articles in the October 2000 issue focus on the Effectiveness Initiative for creating an environment for learning and include the following: (1) "The Processes of Generating Knowledge" (Babeth Ngoc Han Lefur); (2) "Reflections on Dynamics, Processes and Initial Findings" (Leonardo Yanez); (3) "Workshops as a Space for Individual and Collective Change" (Tom Lent); and (4) "Look Again: Documentation and Communication through Audio-Visual Media" (Angela Ernst). Each issue contains information on foundation publications and announcements related to foundation activities. (KB)

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The Bulletin of the Bernard van Leer Foundation

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Early Childhood Matters

FEBRUARY 2000 NO. 94

Listening to children

Bernard van Leer Foundation

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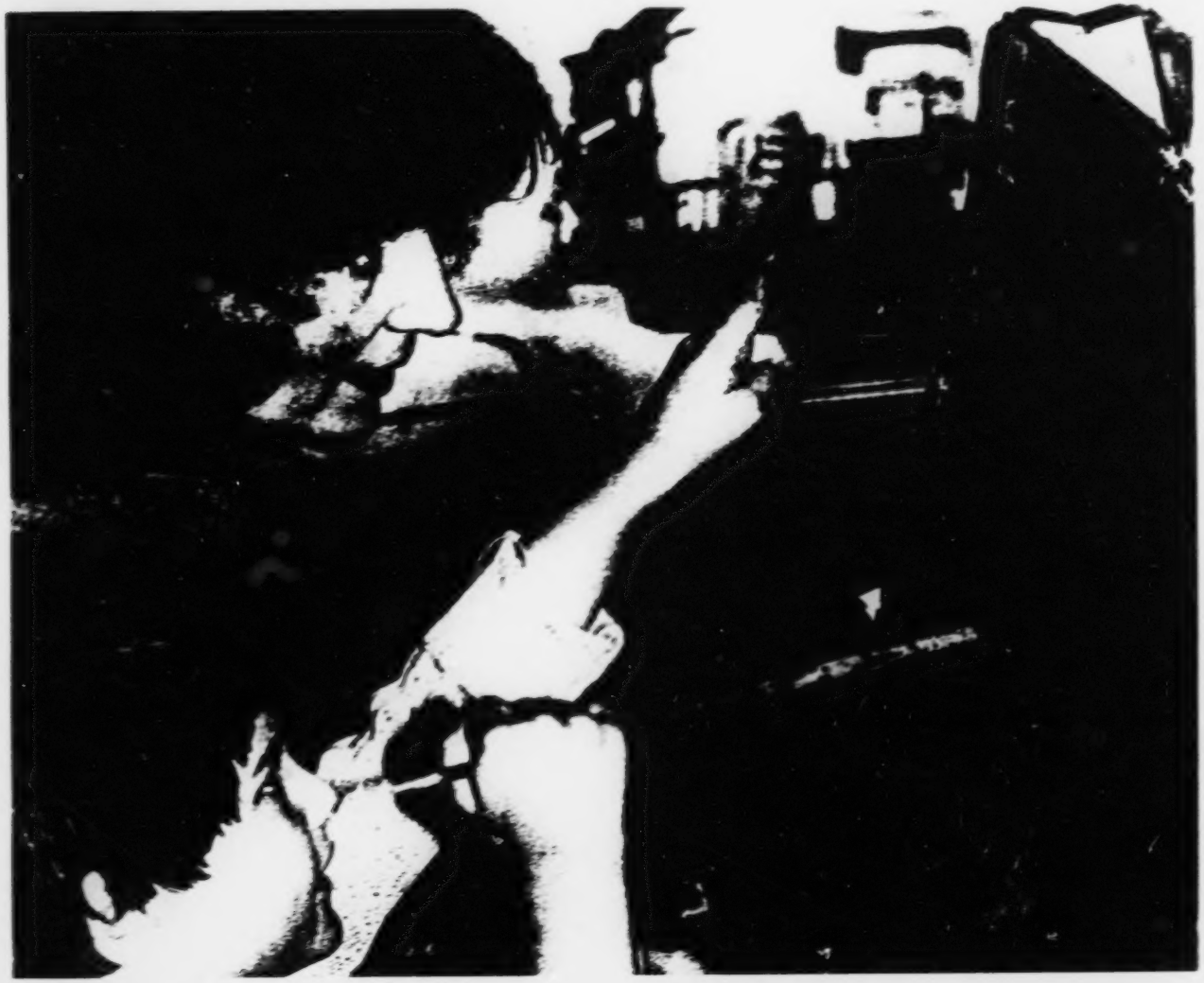
Listening to children

In February 1999, Early Childhood Matters 91 focused on the effectiveness of programmes for children under eight, taking the line that judging the worth of programmes needs reflective and critical input from its principle beneficiaries – the children. The articles went further and suggested greater participation by children in each stage of programmes, from conceptualisation, through operation, to monitoring and evaluation. This is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that children have the right to participate. However, the articles were not suggesting that children should determine what is done with and for them: simply that children should contribute to the processes that result in those decisions. And clearly their ability to contribute will vary according to their stage of development and the opportunities that they have had to develop their participative capacities. Equally, their views have to be listened to and considered along with the views of the other stakeholders in the programmes.

Early Childhood Matters 91 made clear that, while child development programmes for older children had readily embraced participation, programmes for younger children had not. One year on, it seems that the picture has not changed much. In the current edition, we had hoped to feature examples of good practice that explored and discussed the realities of participation, and set out the implications for effective programming. Instead we have only been able to gather articles that show how adults are taking the crucial first steps in developing that participation: establishing environments and practices that enable young children to express themselves confidently and fully, and to develop some experience in participation.

Drawing on experiences in Nepal and Bangladesh, Caroline Arnold (page 6) takes the long term view, showing how parents and communities can support greater participation by young children in many aspects of their everyday lives, even when cultural norms and local contexts pose special challenges. The point is to start from where children, families and communities are, look for naturally occurring opportunities, and build towards what parents and communities decide is better. Arnold shows how positive experiences in the early years both encourage and enable young children to participate during that time, and help to ensure that they will naturally and confidently grow into participatory roles in their families, their communities and their societies in the future. She also considers how to work with some of the challenges – for example, that children sometimes face real contradictions. A young girl may be encouraged to ask questions, analyse issues and solve problems in a particular setting with her peers yet, when she gets home, she is supposed to keep quiet and not offer opinions.



United Kingdom: *This is what I mean*
Hummingbird Housing Association

The second article is about the practicalities of ensuring that children encounter the right participative environments in which they can express themselves readily, knowing that they will be listened to. It is based on work with children, project workers and leaders, and programme directors and coordinators in Nicaragua and Venezuela, in October and November 1999 (page 14). This was an exploration of strategies and approaches for everyday use with young children in 10 centres, an exploration that was amplified by discussions involving workers and leaders from many more centres. The positive and negative experiences were discussed, with project workers and educators working together to learn the lessons and develop the techniques further. However, this was in no sense a carefully structured investigation and this article should be seen simply as a collection of experiences from which some tentative pointers for practice have been drawn. It also includes observations and reflections about the capacities of young children by programme leaders, coordinators and educators from the City of Managua's preschool programme,

from the Preschool Department of the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education and from the Fundación La Verde Sonrisa. These reveal a considerable respect for young children's capacities, but also show that the impact of these capacities on programming is limited. For example, children's creativity is widely respected but it is exercised only within programme activities. It would be fascinating to watch its application to something like the evaluation by the children of an aspect of programming.

The article by Carmen Vásquez de Velasco (page 30) discusses an investigation in two Peruvian communities – one in a remote city, one in an area of the capital city – into helping 60 children aged three to five years to express themselves. She starts by reviewing the benefits of listening to children, linking this to the rights of children and to the needs of the adults who create and operate programmes. For this author, it is vital that adults believe in the importance of listening to children. She goes on to describe the use of cut out figures that children can arrange and rearrange on a graphic background. As they do this, discussions and interviews involving puppets help them to talk freely and express their experiences in the early childhood programmes that they are attending.

Ingibjorg Sigurthorsdottir's article on page 36 is both an aid to developing discussions with children, and a reminder of what young children can do. It shows how discussions between children aged three and above can be developed so that, with the minimum of intervention from adults, they can explore a wide range of topics and themes. Based on the ideas of Dr Matthew Lipman (page 35), the article features children aged three to six years in a preschool in Iceland.

Complementing this we also include a review of a film about similar work with six year olds in a primary school in the USA (page 40). The nature and quality of the discussions reported here support Dr Lipman's conviction that young children are capable of investigating abstract concepts, analysing complex data, and presenting and justifying their ideas and findings. In doing this, they invite us to be much more open to hearing and valuing what they have to tell us.

Overall, this edition offers a range of practical ways of listening to children. It shows that, if adults want to find out how effective early childhood development programmes are for young children, one way is to focus on what children have to say about those programmes. However, this edition raises other significant issues as well. By showing that many adults respect what young children can do, and by demonstrating that children under eight are capable of relatively complex exploration and reflection, it invites adults to reconsider the roles that young children have in programmes. Is it enough to simply ask children what they feel about the programmes that adults devise and operate? Or should adults be thinking hard about opening up the conceptualisation, operational and evaluation processes of programmes to input from young children? If so, how could and should that be realised? In a future edition, I hope we will be able to feature articles that show how practitioners are addressing these kinds of questions.

The next edition

Early Childhood Matters 95 will focus on the roles of parents within programmes as children's first educators. What does their participation in programmes really mean in practice? Under which conditions are parents best able to participate in ECD programmes? To what extent are parents engaged in determining the content of programmes? How do they complement and support the work of early childhood practitioners? How do they contribute to monitoring and evaluation of programmes? What other roles do they play? What are the constraints on their participation – and are some of these artificial? I welcome contributions from you that present and discuss successful practice in this area.

Jim Smale
Editor

Laying the foundations

Caroline Arnold

The author is Regional Child Development Adviser (Asia) for Save the Children (USA and Norway). In this article she takes the long term view of bringing about child participation, showing how parents and communities can support greater participation by young children in many aspects of their everyday lives, even when cultural norms and local contexts pose challenges. The point is to start from where children, families and communities are, look for naturally occurring opportunities, and build towards what parents and communities decide is better. She shows how positive experiences in the early years both encourage and enable young children to participate during that time, and help to ensure that they will naturally and confidently grow into participatory roles in the future. She also considers how to work with some of the challenges.

In development, when we talk about children's participation most of us tend to have pictures of older children in a 'Child-to-Child' scene, some of which have developed into children's clubs where children define issues and create street theatre dramas. We may visualise 'bal melas' (children's fairs) where thousands of children get together and organise games, quizzes, cultural performances, dramas, health exhibitions etc. We may see a street children's council deciding on a programme of activities, or working children presenting their recommendations in an International Conference. We may see their intense concentration as they participate in a Participatory Rural Appraisal session, or as they conduct their own research on a particular topic. We may see them behind a camera, capturing the image they want, telling the story they want to tell.

The connecting thread between much of the most inspiring child-focused work seems to be an emphasis on children's active participation in defining the projects and making decisions at different stages. Adults play a facilitating role rather than being the traditional 'teacher'. The impact of this approach on children's confidence and self-esteem, their enthusiasm for learning and their problem solving abilities is clear.

But it is not always easy. A picture springs to mind of the first Participatory Rural Appraisal that Save the Children (USA) undertook with a group of adolescent girls from a very conservative rural community in Bangladesh. Raised from birth to look after the needs of the men and boys of the family, it was hard for them to believe their opinions were valued. No one had ever sought their opinion on anything so it was hard for them to formulate their ideas and express them. While they were frustrated with many aspects of their lives, envisioning alternatives was very hard. Waiting until children are adolescents before seeking their participation denies children's right

epal: *Learning to participate about early*
hoto: Tom Kelly/Save the Children (usa)

to participate at all ages. If we are really serious about children's participation we have to give them opportunities to grow up in environments which, from birth, positively encourage this.

Starting early

A Save the Children Alliance paper on children's participation stresses that participation should be thought of both early and very broadly: 'It could be a baby who communicates with her mother about food'. This is important because it is during the early years that attitudes critically influencing people's ability to participate effectively are laid down; it is during the earliest years that the seeds of participation are sown; and it is during our earliest interactions that our sense of who we are and the confidence and skills to express ourselves and negotiate our rights are established.

Bangladesh: ***Doing it together***
From *Urban Child Care in Bangladesh* published by Save the Children (USA)

It is children's earliest exchanges (usually with their mothers) where they indicate what they want through sounds and signals and then get what they want, which tell children they can influence their environment and those around them. Later, the degree to which children are encouraged to communicate with words by those around them profoundly influences the way they use language and expect to be able to participate. Picture a four year old girl talking with her father who listens carefully while she tells him all about how one of the chickens got lost and how she found it. He responds with interest and praise, wanting to know more about what happened. The girl feels happy and an important part of her family. It is during such day to day interactions that children develop self control and self confidence (or a sense of failure), learn how to relate to others and what behaviour is culturally acceptable, and develop (or suppress) their curiosity. What really counts are the ways in which families encourage and discourage children to participate in their families and communities.

Similarly, children in centre-based childcare arrangements are affected by the nature of their interactions with adults and peers. Children need to be listened to and appreciated, encouraged to choose between a number of different activities which foster exploration and 'discovery', enabled to join in group activities involving taking turns and so on, and given responsibilities. This gets them off to a good start on the participation track.

Taking the long term, inclusive view

It is relatively easy to support children's participation in specific 'projects'. The longer term challenge lies in ensuring real changes in the ways children can participate throughout their everyday lives – in their families, with their peers, in schools, in their communities and in

Bangladesh: participation for mothers

In Bangladesh, parenting/caregiving programmes are springing up around the country with support from the Early Childhood Development Unit that is supported by Save the Children (USA) and Plan International. These programmes incorporate many traditional religious stories, rhymes and so on, and emphasise a very active participatory approach that respects, draws on and extends caregivers' own experiences and knowledge. The programmes also encourage sharing experiences and problem solving, and supporting mothers to effectively promote their children's development within the context of their everyday activities.

Sessions are lively and diverse – for example, there could be an intense discussion of the mothers' own childhood experiences from which the facilitator helps them draw out a list of basic needs of children. This list bears strong similarities to that in any psychology textbook but is constructed from the mothers' own experiences. They could be roaring with laughter as they invent multiple games to play with a heap of leaves or a pile of seeds. In another group they might be lost in concentration, making toys from banana leaves, clay, old medicine boxes and match boxes. In another they may be discussing games children play at different ages and what they learn from these.

The telling time comes as one observes the mothers with their young children, listening to the way they now talk more with their children, see the value of their children's questions, and understand the usefulness of their play.

the workplace. But there are real contradictions being faced by the child who is encouraged to ask questions, analyse issues and solve problems in a particular group setting with peers, and who then has to keep quiet and not offer opinions once she goes home. Children's own recommendations from a 1997 Save the Children (Norway) workshop in Nepal emphasised this point. They stressed the importance of raising awareness regarding the benefits of children's participation with parents and teachers. We should listen and find ways to do this.

All children have the same basic needs but for programmes to work they must be rooted in the culture, recognise, understand and respect local childrearing practices, and build on existing strengths. This is perhaps the key: valuing diversity; a commitment to developing processes that allow different voices to be heard; and an openness to creating new knowledge and new ideas with all involved in learning. No one group has a monopoly on understanding how to raise children: we all have much to share and learn.

However, societies vary greatly in their understanding of the importance of the early years. While there are a large number and huge variety of ways in which we can influence the contexts in which children are growing up, there are some basic principles that help to ensure that programmes benefit children. In reality, quite often these principles are in potential collision with the dominant ideas – either because of certain cultural beliefs or where communities are under pressure. Some cultural beliefs can be damaging and in direct contradiction to the rights of the child – for example, that girls

should not be educated or that children should be beaten. Programmes have to find ways to challenge such things but from within the culture or community. It is important to remember that culture is neither static nor homogenous and that there are many different beliefs within a given culture.

Another major challenge is to convince people that children learn more easily through active learning methods – that they should not be seen as passive recipients. While early childhood development (ECD) programmes may be pushed into preparing children for formal school, there is more openness within ECD programmes to accepting that children 'learn by doing' at this age than later on. However, the most vital ingredient is the caring responsive caregiver who takes an interest in what the child is doing, supports the child's explorations, and guides and extends learning. It is how the caregiver interacts with children that really matters most, in the home, in the community and in schools.

The two boxes that accompany this article focus on effective ways of working alongside parents, showing examples of how to support children's participation by working with what is there. The whole approach is based on the premise that mothers/caregivers know and achieve a great deal, and on drawing this out from them, building their confidence, and providing important additional information. This type of approach is perhaps especially important in cultures where, from birth, a woman is made to feel of little value.

Yet, for all the diversity of ECD programmes, much of the best of what is happening includes common key elements. There is an explicit emphasis on promoting self-esteem, cooperation, enthusiasm for learning, problem solving and decision making. If such approaches can be used in concert with some of the best of the traditional (for example, teaching dance, music, craft skills and spiritual development) that have been such an important part of transmitting culture, the results can be so very powerful in terms of supporting participation. ○

Drawing: Amara Amarasinghe
UNICEF Colombo and The Children's Secretariat, Sri Lanka

Nepal: participation as a family and community responsibility

This section is taken from Childrearing in Nepal: supporting the strengths of different cultures' childrearing practices in the context of child rights and a changing world, *a study by Save the Children USA/UK, Redd Barna, UNICEF, the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Education, Seto Gurans, CERID and the Children's Environments Research Group from City University of New York (to be published in April 2000).*

The study is an examination of different beliefs, values, patterns and practices in childrearing. It is an attempt to develop effective methodologies to facilitate collaborative dialogue with families, communities and partners around children's overall development and rights. A major aim of the study is to develop effective ways to initiate discussion and debate on key issues for children (including on participation). These will be the basis for practical joint planning for interventions that will help promote children's optimal development and ensure their rights. In working with the results of the study, the communities decide what is important. Once they have set the agenda, discussions take account of the very real constraints people face because of economic difficulties, workloads, and so on, as communities search for what they can do to improve things.

Contextual factors

The study clarified some factors that have to be taken into account in this kind of work in this region. The first of these is to maintain positive traditional practices which are under threat from modernisation and outside influences. Not all cultural practices are good and the challenge is to hold a balance between keeping customary practices strong while at the same time enabling children to develop skills that will help to ensure that they can participate successfully in a rapidly changing world.

The second factor is the blurred boundary between work and play. Even very young children help families with daily chores. However – with the exception of childcare – much of this is in essentially play imitation rather than serious work.

The third factor is children's identity within the family and community. This is very much a function of their developing capacity for work. One mother of four felt that the small tasks that children begin to take on at five or six give them a strong sense of self-worth by proving their competence and gaining the respect of their parents, friends and older siblings. Her own children willingly helped to care for the plants in her nursery.

The fourth factor is that children's work is partly a practical response to necessity and partly regarded as essential for learning fundamental life skills and habits. Children become adept in a range of physical skills, in the capacity to plan ahead, in making judgements and decisions and in taking responsibility. They also learn about the environment – for instance, Sher Bahadur (a father) describes teaching his children when the twigs of a plant can safely be cut for cattle fodder.

The fifth factor is that children's involvement in community work activities is encouraged and their efforts are respected from an early age: they watch parents and older siblings at work, learn from them, and become rapidly skilled enough to contribute themselves. They also feel useful, involved and competent. However, later on the burden of work, especially for girls, can quickly restrict opportunities rather than expand them.

The sixth factor is that parents have goals, hopes and expectations for their children. Ideally, boys are expected to be well educated and get good jobs so they can care for their parents in their old age. Girls are usually expected to

Bangladesh: *Shahinoor dressed as a bride*
From *Urban Child Care in Bangladesh* published by Save the Children (USA)

become capable and disciplined so that they can marry well and bring prestige to their families. Taken at face value, these goals suggest that children's own well-being and happiness were immaterial, except as they contributed to parents' long term security and contentment. However, parents clearly show that children's satisfaction with their lives is a significant, almost overriding concern, especially with young children; while men and boys, interestingly, were more likely than women to suggest that girls, too, might become educated people capable of holding down important jobs.

The seventh factor is that children's participation has risks. Rather than adapting the environment for their protection, the emphasis is on adapting children to the realities of the environment. That means increasing their awareness, competence and capacity to deal effectively with risk. For example, by the age of three or four, children may be able to use sickles adeptly. But accidents are an issue and a major concern for families.

The eighth factor is that parents are very aware that encouragement and support can stimulate learning and growth; and that guidance and support are especially important in the development of self-discipline and morality.

Being effective within this context

Within this context, our experience is that the following are key areas for development workers to concentrate on if children are to become confident and competent agents in their own development.

Support families in building children's confidence and communication skills within the context of everyday activities (feeding, cooking, washing, household chores, work in the fields, and so on)

Recognise that what happens within the home is by far the most significant influence on the child and develop programmes accordingly.

- Build parents/caregivers' awareness and confidence in the huge role they already play in supporting their children's learning and overall development, in their everyday interactions with the children.
- Build parents/caregivers' understanding of the role of everyday activities in learning basic concepts.
- Emphasise that much of what families already do is really positive and gives their children

a very deep sense of self-worth.
- Emphasise the importance of children continuing to participate in family discussions and decisions, and having their opinions listened to and valued. Show how to initiate discussions based on what they are doing.
- Encourage children to solve problems and make decisions.

Help to eliminate threats and fear

Discuss the fact that, although they love their children, many parents sometimes use threats and fear. Explain that this can undermine children's confidence and harm their development. Explain the importance of helping children to understand why they have to cooperate. Explain to parents that they should only make threats that they are willing to carry out.

Encourage more opportunities for girls and more responsibility in boys

Discuss with parents and the community the reasons why, in comparison with boys, girls may take on more and more household tasks and be left with little opportunity for interaction and gaining the kinds of experiences that build their confidence and therefore help their participation. Work with the aspirations parents have for their daughters and enable discussions about the contradictions there are between those aspirations and the roles and opportunities that girls have.

Seizing opportunities

Showing an interest in what interests children

A group of girls aged six and under acted out a marriage ceremony. Some were carrying bundles on their backs to represent babies, some acted out being the bride. The mother joined the role play by putting red tika, representing married girls, on all of them: she showed her interest in the children's play by getting involved and acting in it.

Learning to dance with confidence

Children and adults often gathered in front of a house to dance and sing. On one particular evening, a large group had gathered. A small girl of five to six years was asked to dance in the centre. At first she hesitated, but her mother encouraged her to go and others pulled her into the middle to dance. As she was dancing she was moving her hands, fingers and legs freely in time to the music. She was trying to sing the song along with the rest of the group. From time to time, she looked at her mother and smiled at her. Her mother was smiling back at her and this encouraged the girl to be able to face the crowd and continue dancing on her own. Researchers observed that the girl and her mother both had a sense of pride at the girl being able to dance in front of the crowd.

Bamboo umbrella weaving

It was the rainy season and Prem Bahadur was weaving shyagu (a typical umbrella made of bamboo). His four year old son was watching eagerly. Prem noticed this and asked 'Where have you put the shyagu you wove yesterday?' The boy brought the shyagu, hung it under the roof of the porch area and sat near to his father. The father had already woven half of the shyagu and suggested that his son finish it. At first, the son hesitated so the father taught him: 'First catch the strip like this ... no, no ... like this, look here'. The son caught it as the father directed. The father again directed him 'Push it into that part like this' and the boy did what the father directed. The child laughed and repeated this. The father helped him again to do the job and he did well, although it took a long time and slowed the father down a lot. Both laughed and the father said 'Well done, if you repeat this again tomorrow, you will be perfect'. The boy looked very satisfied and went to the water tap carrying the shyagu which he had woven the day before. ❍

Ready to talk:

explorations in Nicaragua and Venezuela

Jim Smale

In late 1999 I spent some time working alongside educators, project directors and leaders and directors and coordinators of projects and programmes in Nicaragua and Venezuela, many of these projects and programmes are supported by the Foundation. Our work was about the practicalities of ensuring that young children encounter the right participative environments in which they can express themselves readily, knowing that they will be listened to. Specifically, we tried out a wide and varied range of strategies and approaches for everyday use with young children, in 17 working sessions in 10 preschools and centres.

This article is a record of that work. However, we did not carry out a carefully structured investigation and the article should therefore be seen as a collection of experiences from which some tentative pointers for practice have been drawn by the people who did the work. These pointers are set out in a separate section (page 27).

We didn't see listening to children as an end in itself but as a first, crucial step in an exploration of how young children might participate more fully in all stages of programmes that are operated for their benefit. The article therefore also includes observations and reflections about the capacities of young children to participate by programme leaders, coordinators and educators from the City of Managua's preschool programme, from the Preschool Department of the Nicaraguan Ministry of Education and from La Fundación La Verde Sonrisa (The Green Smile Foundation).

Work with young children should be done by those they know and trust. The work in Nicaragua and Venezuela was therefore in the hands of the children's own educators – the people who spend more time with them than anyone else except their immediate family members. Because of this, there's a particular character and quality to what was done: it was practical, set in the everyday, and dependent on the knowledge, experience and empathy of the educators. This also kept the objectives tight: to experiment with practical ways of helping children to express themselves; to explore what educators can usefully discover from young children; and to consider what they can and should do with the outcomes. It also defined the nature of the data that emerged, and the nature of the analyses of, and speculations about, those data: what is useful in practice and – taking the broader view – how this affects the

ways in which programmes are conceptualised, monitored and evaluated.

Just asking

The first two working sessions in Nicaragua were in centres in marginal communities in San Marcos, a suburb of the capital, Managua. One was actually the educator's home, the second was a simple shed. These centres are associated with the Movimiento Comunal Nicaraguense. Each session started with a warm up activity that the children (four to seven years) already knew. The educators then simply asked the children questions about the preschool and their reactions to it, what they liked and did not like doing, and what they wanted to be when they grew up. Each also developed further questions from the replies. Most children responded although many responses were minimal and very predictable – for example, 'I want to be a doctor' often followed by 'I do too'.

No public discussion developed between the children: everything passed through the educator. Neither educator, naturally enough in these first short sessions, took the discussions to a deeper level or generated discussions between the children.

Three points arose (and these recurred throughout the sessions with children): the first was that the educators and children functioned very well together, the children were responsive and gave every sign that they had plenty of things to share. The second point was that between themselves, the children whispered with some excitement, prompted each other, reminded each other about things, told each other what to do, asked each other questions, reported to each other. It was impossible to really catch or record these subtexts, annexes and asides. The third point was that, at the end of the session, the children immediately engaged in very intense discussions again between themselves, some of which were about the session we had conducted but most of which appeared to be about other things that were clearly interesting – even exciting – to them.

Drawing and talking

The third session was in Cuidad Sandino, Managua in the 'Los Cumiches' centre that is associated with the Centro de Educación y Comunicación Popular (CANTERA – Centre for Popular Education and Communication). Here two educators tried a different approach involving two groups each of four children. One group consisted of four year olds, the other of six and seven year olds. Led by their educators, the children simply drew what they wanted to and talked about their drawing as they produced it. Then the educators brought the two groups together and asked the children to talk about their drawings. Questions from the educators brought out more and the children commented as each presentation was made, picking up on what was being said, adding to it, discussing it. Each child was readily able to express what they wanted to and this seemed to be because their basic attitude is 'Let's try it and see where it takes us, and we take it'. Some of the points that emerged from the presentations and subsequent questioning were of clear importance. One theme that arose frequently was being hit:

> *Why is the doll crying?*
> *Because her father hit her.*
> *Why did her father hit her?*
> *Because she did something wrong.*
> *And how did her father hit her?*
> *Like this. (demonstrates)*

In this case, the educator was well aware of the violence that some children suffer and the centre already has a programme to reduce parental violence. Another point that emerged here was the educator's skill in asking simple direct questions that allowed children

to give more information. The educators also stimulated the children to produce more thoughts by making suggestions but were careful not to lead them.

The drawings and the information that emerged from three children were especially interesting. One seven year old boy was exceptionally articulate about what he wanted to be when he grew up. A six year old girl had very clear ideas about her ideal house. Questioned by her educator, it was clear that this was rather different from her current house – but she didn't seem to mind. One four year old child drew a complicated picture full of everything that was important to her. As she talked us through it, a full picture emerged of her life as she perceived it.

In a discussion with a larger group of educators afterwards, the two who had taken part in the exercise were very enthusiastic about what they and the children had done together. They recognised its potential for enhancing children's opportunities for expressing themselves; but they added that whatever was revealed had to be put with what else they knew about each child. They also indicated the importance of their empathy with young children and their long professional experience.

Children are capable

The fourth session was led by Dr Juan José Morales, National Director of Preschool Education, and included 11 coordinators of the Municipality of Managua and of the Ministry of Education. It took the form of a discussion about participation by young children and how to achieve it, and was at a more abstract level than discussions with the educators. It revealed a strong belief in children as individual people, who are capable of expressing themselves clearly, and who need educators to set the environment and make opportunities for them to develop their creativity and contribute their ideas.

- *Children have lots of ideas: teachers have to be facilitators to help children express them.*
- *We have to see children as active and constant participants who are not just being directed by adults.*
- *We have to give them the freedom to express themselves, to investigate, to discover, to know, to contribute.*
- *Teachers need to be sensitive to each child, and the dynamics that help them to express themselves also have to be specific.*
- *We can ask them: 'What can we do about this?'; 'What do you think about this situation?'; 'What can we do to make it better?'*
- *We have to take into account everything children say and everything they know.*
- *We are weak in this, we are too locked into preparation for primary school.*

Clearly, the participants in this discussion appreciated the potential in young children and believe that it should be built up and built upon. However, for this to happen, all those who are concerned with young children's participation – parents, educators, community members, and policy and decision makers – must establish a political climate in which children are put at the centre, and seen as individuals whose contributions are expected, welcomed and taken seriously.

Getting it wrong

The fifth session took place in Villa Venezuela and Villa Canada, two marginalised areas of Managua that were severely affected by Hurricane Mitch and by flooding in October 1999. The sessions were in a centre associated with the Centro de Información y Servicios Asesoria en Salud (CISAS – Centre for Information and Advice Services in Health) and focused on

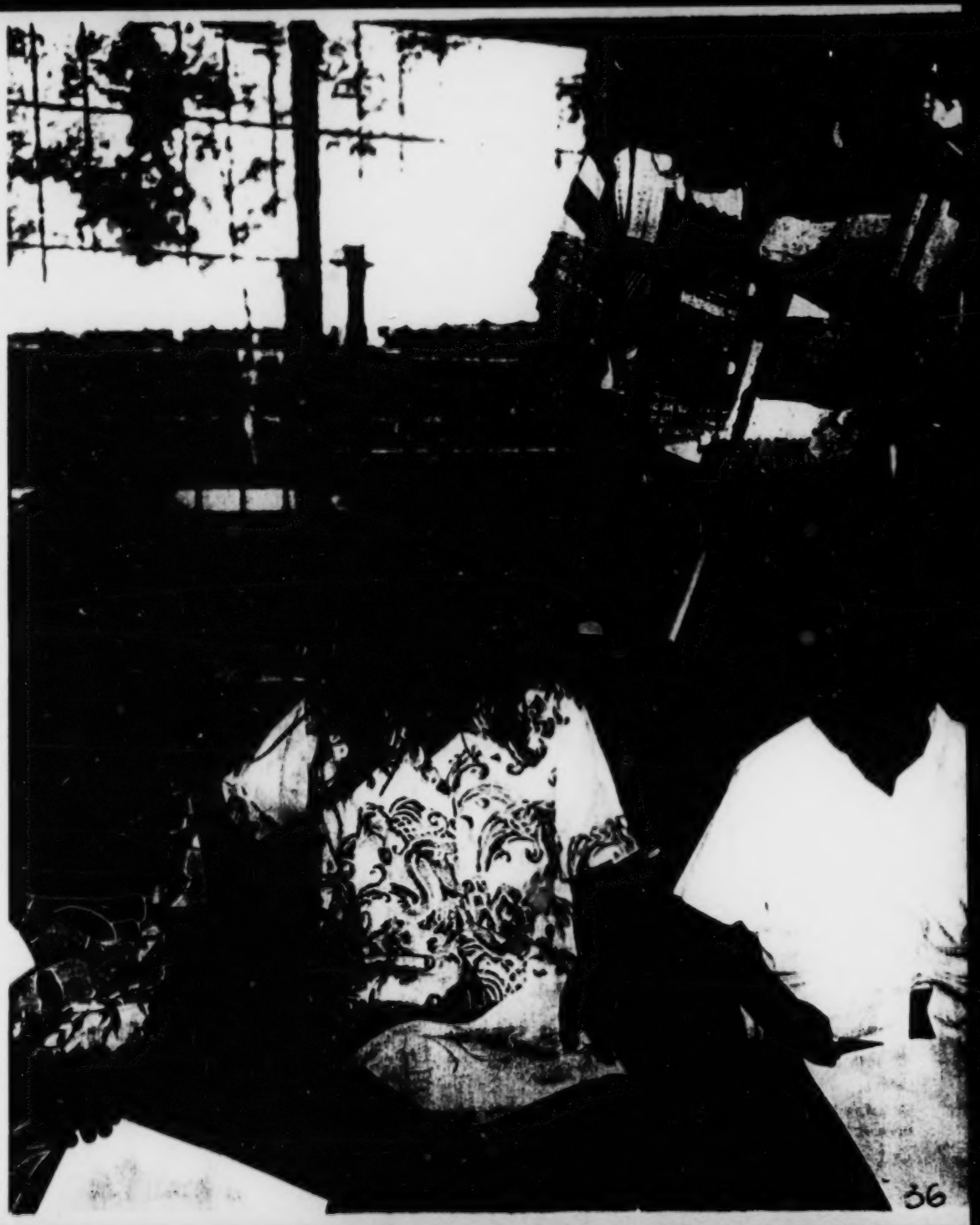
Nicaragua Los Cumiches Centre:
Drawing, talking about the drawing and recording
photo: Jim Smale

three approaches. The first was an adult stranger interviewing a five year old ... the child was overwhelmed and said absolutely nothing. Our conclusion was that the problem was not an outsider interviewing young children but the child not feeling comfortable and confident.

The second approach we tried was a 12 year old boy from the same centre interviewing the same five year old. Again this was unsuccessful for very much the same reasons. Later, in a different setting, with much more experienced young people in charge, it worked well.

We then ran a session in which 11, 12 and 13 year olds tried to recall the kinds of experiences, ideas and thoughts they had had as young children. They had some vague recollections about how they felt about a teacher, or some of the activities they were involved in but little more. Perhaps the only useful grain of information that emerged was from a thirteen year old boy who remembered just one thing about his school when he was about five or six:

I liked drawing. I used to like drawing (characters from a violent cartoon series for children).



Nicaragua Marc Mataheru Centre: *Ask me what this means*
Drawing by one of the children from the working session

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Again this approach worked better later on in another setting with a particular group of young people.

Working in groups

The next three sessions were in preschools associated with Comité Pro Ayuda Social (COMPAS – Committee for Social Support) in other marginalised areas of Managua. The first of these – and the sixth in total – was in the 'La Colibri' centre. Here one of the educators ran a session with a group of about 25 children aged four to six, asking them questions and generating a basic discussion about what they wanted to be when they grew up. This produced a lot of animated excitement and the same sorts of responses as elsewhere such as 'I want to be a teacher'.

It was clear that launching and sustaining this group discussion was easy for the experienced educator. Children knew what to expect of their educator, and were prepared to go with her, while the educator knew how to lead them through new, important activities. A group of 25 was practical, although the educator had to ensure that all children had the opportunity to express what they really wanted to.

The seventh session was in the 'Marc Mataheru' centre in a similar area. Here one of the educators ran a drawing lesson based on previous work on parts of the human body – she was building on what they already knew, and taking them further by getting them to express more. She did this by having each of the children discuss what they had drawn, then having other children amplify that. The whole of the session was done with the children using a microphone and this seemed to encourage several of them to speak very articulately, almost as if they were performing.

The educator then asked the children for topics that interested them from television, from radio or from their

own experiences. Topics that emerged included poverty, children begging on the streets, finding bombs left over from the civil war... and in the middle, one child recited the story of Little Red Riding Hood. The educator was quick to pick up each new topic and help each child express more and more. This meant that the session wandered around a lot but it clearly interested all children, and the educator always brought it back to the point.

She also ran a session asking children what they wanted to be when they grew up. This again produced some predictable (and perhaps unrealistic) responses. However, some of the children were able to justify what they had said – for example:

> *I want to be a doctor to help people get better.*
> *I want to be an engineer because they earn a lot of money.*

Afterwards, the educators of the centre discussed their thoughts about the participation of children. They were overwhelmingly positive, and talked about their respect for the children they work with and about their intelligence, cleverness, creativity and humanity. Their work with the children already takes account of these qualities and the educators want to do more work on getting children to express themselves. They agreed that, in principle, children's views should have more impact on the life and work of the centre.

The eighth session was in the 'Centro Integral Infantil Fernando Gordillo' where children between five and seven presented a puppet show of welcome for their visitors. This was impressive and the presenters were obviously very excited and involved. We discussed the idea of using puppets with the educator concerned and he said that young children identified closely with the characters that they are presenting. They make up their own dialogue and can thereby reveal not only their creativity, but their understandings, thoughts, and so on. He said that he was often surprised by the ideas they came up with through working on stories for the puppets to tell. The Director of the centre and the educators subsequently discussed their own work, drawing out the qualities that they saw children demonstrating. They too stressed the respect they have for the capacities and abilities of young children.

In discussions with Helia María Gutiérrez and Vilma Cuadra of COMPAS after these three sessions, they emphasised a number of points that have emerged over the years. These included the following.

- That there is a natural link between valuing creative activities and supporting the holistic development of young children effectively.
- That educators show their respect for children by the amount of intelligence, humanity and creativity they bring into their work.
- That by using puppets, drawings, language development and commentaries, the educators reinforce the impact of their teaching.
- That children don't mind being interrupted if they are expressing themselves naturally.
- That most children show a natural ability to develop dialogues.
- That as they draw, they are simultaneously identifying and refining their thoughts about the subject of their drawing.
- That individual attention is vital for inhibited children if they are to have the confidence and sense of security to participate in group sessions.

Applying the lessons

The remaining sessions were in Venezuela and built on what had been learned from the sessions in Nicaragua. The first Venezuelan session was in the 'Centro Comunitario de Atención

Preescolar' (CECAP – Community Centre for Preschool Care) in Los Cipres, a marginalised area of the capital Caracas built on a vulnerable hillside. Before we went on to work with the children, the General Coordinator of CECAP discussed the ways in which young children partly determine the content of the working day. These include making selections from the activities offered and developing these as they wished to, and developing dramatic presentations together. The Coordinator stressed the need to allow things to arise naturally from children and for the educators to pick up on these and help children to develop them in their own ways. In considering listening to children, she made clear that adults are most successful when they empathise with the young children. Although the educators are not experts in psychology, they are highly proficient in recognising young children's needs and wishes, and they are very good at knowing how children are responding. Skills and abilities like these clearly fit with more formal or structured attempts to understand what children are expressing.

Following this, one of the centre's educators explored three approaches with five children aged four to six: the educator asking questions; the children making drawings and then responding to questions from adults; and the children reflecting on their future in response to questions from the educator. As in other centres, the most successful approach was allowing children to draw pictures and then discuss what they had drawn. Again, as they talked about their drawings, the educator was able to help them to express more. She did this by bringing in additional aspects of the subject of each child's drawing and getting the artist to discuss these as well.

In the second session, a class of children aged eight to ten in the same centre tried to recall their experiences of being small. This generated a lot of enthusiasm and drew in other young people who happened to be passing. It was noticeable that the older the children were, the less they could recall, and that what they did say seemed to come mostly from what they must have been told – for example, being able to walk at one year old.

The third session in Venezuela was in the Centros Comunitarios de Aprendizaje (CECODAP – Community Learning Centres) with 11 adolescents from the Así Somos project that helps children establish their own social agendas. One outstanding feature of this project is that the older children undertake quite formal programmes of work with younger children, effectively acting both as mentors and enablers. Each member of the group made individual presentations about their work with young children and expressed their opinions about who and what young children are.

- *Four and five year olds are interested in any topic and are quick learners.*
- *They love to mimic.*
- *They have opinions of their own, they are not just parrots.*
- *The themes that they bring up include assaults, the absence of their parents and being punished.*
- *They love playing, making things, drawing (and they can be good at expressing things through that), singing and making music.*
- *I think that making music makes them more intelligent.*
- *The people who give them affection, they draw bigger.*
- *They get so much information from television.*
- *They watch cartoons on television and talk like the characters. This restricts their ability to express themselves – and they pick up bad words as well.*
- *When I work with them, I start from what they know.*
- *You can talk with them about their needs and about good things and bad things in their lives.*
- *One girl told me she is against abortion because she is alive.*

They then tried to interview two five year olds. Failing in this – as had their peers in Nicaragua – they discussed together how to proceed. They quickly decided that just two adolescents should try to interview each five year old. This didn't work well either. They again discussed the problems between themselves and came up with the idea of having the five year olds make drawings about the topics they wanted to discuss. As in other centres, asking questions about the drawings enabled the children to express much more than was in their drawings. But what was interesting here was that the adolescents managed to move beyond a simple questions and answer routine by sustaining a fluidity that almost turned the young children into storytellers.

A superstar in the making?

The fourth session in Venezuela was with David Ordonez Diaz aged five and his mother who is also an educator. David is very energetic and confident and will probably become a major figure in the broadcasting industry in the future. We recorded a question and answer session between him and his mother and he then interviewed his mother briefly before going on to interview another adult. He sought opinions on homosexuality and, after his mother had checked that he knew what the word meant, he listened very intently to the reply. This was an interesting illustration of something that had already arisen in discussions with programme coordinators: that young children are getting a lot of information from all kinds of sources and need to check it, amplify it and come to healthy understandings.

The fifth session was with a class of six year olds in the Do Re Mi preschool in the centre of Caracas. This was a more formal setting in which David did the interviewing. The children were rather subdued in responding to David's earnest desire to discover their attitudes to homosexuals and to children's rights. Later they interviewed each other about whatever they liked, but again they seemed reserved. Finally, we set up a 'television studio' in the classroom and they tried being television interviewers. Again this was not very successful: the children didn't animate the idea as well as we had expected. One clear reason for this is that we hadn't recognised that the context was different – that children were used to more formal approaches than we introduced. However, this does raise the question of whether children in informal settings are more agile in responding to new experiences than those in more formal settings.

The sixth session was in the same preschool with a class of two, three and four year olds. David did the interviews but the responses were again very limited. Later he took the tape recorder and about six of the children into a small play house. The outcome was predictable: a tape full of the happy sounds of small children exploring an exciting new experience: recording themselves and listening to the results.

The seventh session in Venezuela was with 12 young people between eight and twelve from the Asociación Ayuda a los Niños (AAN – Association for Helping Children). All were former street children who had been associated with AAN for between three and twelve months, building new lives or restoring their pre-street lives. These young people were able to recall their memories of being five or six years old without trouble, in contrast with the group of similarly aged young people in Nicaragua. They did this first individually, then in two groups where they reflected together on three good things that they could remember and three bad things. Each wrote their own memories down and later read them out, sometimes adding extra commentary.

Good memories included:

- *When they bought me the doll I really wanted.*
- *When I got to know new friends in school.*
- *When I was in a bookshop and I found some steps so I could reach the books I liked.*
- *When I was finally old enough to go to the meeting place – but that didn't last long because they closed it.*
- *When, in the second grade at school, I saw my name on the roll of honour for the first time.*
- *When I arrived at preschool and they told me that my brother had been born.*
- *Looking after my brothers.*
  When I was elected Queen of Carnival by the people in the building that I lived in.
- *Learning to swim: when I first tried I swallowed so much water that I nearly drowned.*
- *When I went to my first piano concert.*
- *When my brother helped me to talk and taught me how to do the work that I had to do.*

Bad memories included:

- *When for the first time I learned what it meant to be called a nickname, a nickname that expressed hate for me.*
- *When I first saw a coffin – it gave me nightmares.*
- *When my two best friends and I hit each other.*
- *When I wasn't allowed to go to the meeting place because I was too young.*
- *When we were in a friend's house, all of my family, for a fiesta, then the next day I heard my uncle had died. That was terrifying.*
- *When my mother and I were attacked and robbed – it happened so fast.*
- *When I heard that my best friend had been shot. This affected me more than anything else because we were always together.*
- *When at college they maltreated us children, hitting us on the head.*
- *When I fell off a two metre high wall and I asked my mother who she was because I had lost my memory.*

Discussing their recall ability afterwards, we wondered whether it is linked to the kinds of lives they have lived as street children. Their life experiences have been extreme in comparison to those of children who have enjoyed a safer, more stable and more loving environment. We speculated that these experiences have helped to make them self reliant, independent, capable, determined and resilient in their lives; and more reflective, alert and aware as they have drawn on their experiences, considered their situations and made their decisions.

The eighth session in Venezuela – and the 17th in all – was with Juan Angel Gouveia, a profoundly deaf young man who works with young deaf children. He reflected on what he has discovered in this work, offering deaf children's views of the communication problems they have and showing how these can be overcome.

> *Many parents don't understand deaf children: they think that because the children can't hear, have trouble learning to talk and can't express themselves, they are not intelligent. Many children tell me that their parents discriminate against them in comparison with non deaf children: they are told what to do, made to do things, manipulated and prevented from participating as non deaf children do. Some are also maltreated. The problem is that the parents lack knowledge and understanding, and treat their deaf children like objects.*
>
> *CECODAP has a programme that I'm involved in to educate parents about deaf children, helping them to*

understand how difficult it is for them to learn, showing them how to teach children to learn words. The best way is to teach the children sign language first. Using drawings, paintings, photographs and play all help as they learn what words are and how to use them.

Young deaf children can participate in many ways once they have learned to communicate and once people have learned to 'listen' to them. They love mime theatre because it's play acting and all kids love that – but, more important, it uses bodily and facial expression rather than words. They are also very good at using computers to show people the words that they need to.

This was a good session with which to complete the work in Nicaragua and Venezuela. Juan Angel has drawn particular experiences out of young deaf children. But, in many ways, these also highlight some of the more general adult attitudes and understandings that many young children encounter, and that often limit their potential to communicate well.

Conclusions

After experiencing so much in so many centres, I have no doubts about the quality of what children in these preschools and centres are offered: the curricula are broad, constructed around rights/needs of children and based on the concept of holistic development. The environments are welcoming, safe, purposeful and rich; activities are stimulating and highly participative; the educators are knowledgeable, experienced, and deeply committed to their work and the children they work with. And the children clearly want to be there, are completely engaged and respect – even love – the educators. They are confident, articulate, industrious, spontaneous, creative, full of fun and curiosity... and they are enjoying it all.

At times, they are also able to determine some elements of the programmes.

Venezuela Do Re Mi Centre: *David Ordanez Diaz (right) prepares for a glittering career in the media*
photo: **Jim Smale**

For example: centres may start with a session in which children choose what they will do from the range of possibilities that are on offer. Equally, educators are sensitive to how children are responding and make changes to the planned programme; and they expect children to initiate activities which they, the educators, support. There is even a sense in which children evaluate elements of the programme: their reactions are picked up by the educators who may then decide to change the immediate programming.

In other words, children already do participate to a limited extent in deciding what is included in their programmes and how these programmes are conducted. However, my view is that participation is largely understood as 'They come, we offer them a good programme, they participate in it'. Young children do not participate formally or directly in a programme's conceptualisation and planning stages. They only impact on the operation of the programme in the sense of affecting some elements of its day to day running and have only an incidental involvement in formal monitoring or evaluation. In this, they are well behind older children and this invites the question 'How much more is possible?'

In this context, it was very interesting to hear about the respect for young children's capacities that adults involved in early childhood programmes have. I didn't encounter any examples of what it means to build on those capacities by trying to bring young children into a broader and deeper participation in project life. But what would happen if – perhaps using techniques designed to exploit their creativity – they were invited to contribute their ideas, needs, perceptions, reactions, feelings and dreams as programmes are conceptualised? How would projects approach and manage that kind of change in process? What might be the nature of structures and mechanisms they would need to devise to make that change? How would they ascribe value to what young children contributed in relation to the inputs of other stakeholders? How might the nature and operation of the resultant programmes be changed? Following on from this, at what other stages of a programme could young children also participate, and in what ways?

Enabling children to express themselves freely and fully, knowing that they will be listened to, is a prerequisite for even beginning to consider the viability of such participation. The work that we carried out in Nicaragua and Venezuela explored a wide range of simple and practical approaches, methods and techniques to allow that expression. These complemented what – often empathetically or intuitively – educators already do. We couldn't take these approaches, methods and techniques very far in such a short time, and children revealed relatively little to us. But we were left with a strong feeling that, given time, they would enable us to hear what we have to know from young children, if we are to understand what they are able to contribute to programmes.

Warm thanks and acknowledgements

This article is the outcome of a collaborative effort involving over 100 people whose lives are dedicated to early childhood development: the educators, directors, committee members and parents of the preschools, centres and organisations who willingly changed their normal routines to make this work possible. In addition, hundreds of children participated in the work. The article belongs to all of these people.

A core group of directors, specialists and leaders was responsible for conceptualising and coordinating the work, and for helping to develop the article. They were: Aura Lila Ulloa (CANTERA, Nicaragua); Dr Juan José Morales (National Director of Preschool Education, Nicaragua); Helia María Gutiérrez and Vilma Cuadra (COMPAS, Nicaragua); Gustavo Hernandez (CISAS, Nicaragua); Luz Daniela Talavera (La Fundación La Verde Sonrisa, Nicaragua); Ada Ligia Portocarrero (Movimiento Comunal Nicaraguense); and Oscar Misle, Fernando Reviera, Soraya Medina, Elizabeth Hernandez, Catalina Martinez and Jenifer Quintana (CBCODAP, Venezuela).

Nicaragua Marc Mataheru Centre: *Getting into the world of small children*
photo: Marc Mataheru Centre

Building children's expressive capacities

The ninth working session in Nicaragua was a meeting with the Director and the Head of Social programmes of the Fundación La Verde Sonrisa, and eight voluntary educators from seven marginalised areas of Managua. The educators work in the Casas de Atención Infantil (Childcare Houses) project. Most of the session was centred on an exploration by each of the educators of the nature of their work and the activities that they develop with young children. We also discussed helping children express themselves, and how they can participate in more profound ways. A range of points emerged: some were linked to mutual development of the preschools and the children who help to make them what they are; some were about using natural abilities that are being developed in children; and some were straightforward techniques that educators employed. Here is a range of the points that were made.

- *The educator is a facilitator. Children have to discover, to find out, to control their learning. This helps their creativity, helps them be curious, ask questions, think, understand cause and effect – by their own efforts.*
- *You have to give them options so they can choose what to do, opportunities for them to express how their lives are, how the world appears to them. They are better developed intellectually because of being in the preschool. They have opinions about what is happening. We have to expand opportunities for them to reflect.*
- *Creativity is important. Children are fascinated by playing with materials. They invent and tell their own stories, and we learn from them. Their imagination enables them to enter these stories and express how it feels to be in the situations in the stories.*
- *Painting and play are good for helping children to express what is in their heads.*
- *If they tell you what their father does by acting it, they show you all the details. They make jokes and puns as well. One of the tools the father uses is called a cat, so they make cat noises when they act the father using it.*
- *When we did the first evaluation, in very simple words parents said things like 'Juanito is more awake, he sings, he plays, he's more developed, he speaks more, he expresses himself better, he is better at communicating'.*
- *The small ones choose what we are going to sing and we give them little dolls to help them. They invent new verses.*
- *We tell them stories and they add to them, develop them, participate by contributing their ideas.*

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Nicaragua Centro Integral Infantil Fernando Gordillo: *My puppet speaks for me*
photo: Jim Smale

Some tentative pointers

After each practical session, there was a discussion between the adults who had participated. The following views, observations, opinions, analyses and pointers for good practice offer the essence of those discussions. They are broken up under a number of headings for easy reference but shouldn't be considered in isolation: all emerged from complex operational contexts.

The children

To really understand what young children want or need to express needs medium to long term work.

Children in informal settings seem much more confident and ready to take part, with or without their teachers.

In individual discussions, young children can be open, confident and responsive as long as they feel comfortable with whoever is asking them questions.

Most children show a natural ability to develop dialogues.

Casually sitting next to young children in the middle of an animation and starting a discussion with them doesn't seem to inhibit them – although it can distract other children.

When children tell stories they can add to them with a little prompting, thereby demonstrating their creativity while also giving useful information.

Some children will spontaneously begin to talk about something without any prompting from the educator – to the extent that they actually get in the way of other children. This leads to diversions but can offer unexpected opportunities to get at more ideas from children. The educators can pick up on these and help children to develop them in their own ways.

During most of the sessions, the children were often engaged in dialogues, promptings and commentaries between themselves. Capturing that is hard but will undoubtedly amplify the quantity and, we felt, the quality of what the children are actually expressing. Similarly, after the exercises they moved spontaneously on through an interim stage that included some discussion/commentary about what they had been involved in, but then quickly settled around an agenda that they seemed to develop spontaneously among themselves and that seemed to evolve in an organic way. We will miss a lot if we can't find ways to have them share with us what they share with each other.

Using a microphone and amplifier resulted in many children performing, as if they were mimicking being on television. Alternatively, it may have been just the environment that the educator has – very skilfully – established. Either way, in performing, the children opened up opportunities for their educator to enable them to express more.

Topics in existing curricula can be used to help children express themselves – in one centre these included the human body and coping with discarded bombs.

Some topics seem to matter a lot to children even though these don't necessarily impact on them directly – for example: children begging.

Although David (see page 21) was one of a kind, he showed what a five year old can do. His awareness and depth of understanding, coupled with confidence and an ability to immediately take on a job and do it well, made him a kind of benchmark in terms of the potential that young children may have for participating in projects.

In a formal setting, the introduction of approaches that children don't expect needs good preparation.

Greater formality may anyway have made the children inhibited – they seemed almost frozen without the

Nicaragua La Colibri Centre: *This drawing is about ...*
photo: Jim Smale

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guidance and support of their teachers. When we removed the formal structure of their day, they tended to drift down into a kind of unfocused restlessness.

Most older children could recall little or nothing about being five or six years old. However, a group of former street children (8-12 years) was able to recall a great deal.

Older children can be very adept educators. They can monitor their own performances, make necessary changes and yet constantly pursue their objectives. They can be astute in adapting their tone and manner to support the five year olds and make things easier for them; and they are readily accepted by the five year olds as interlocutors.

The educators

Educators communicate with children naturally, in their normal style, in their role as educators – someone who the children trust and are used to working with.

They are often most effective when they empathise with the young children.

They are highly proficient in recognising young children's needs and wishes, and they are very good at knowing how children are responding.

Their approach affects the nature of the interchange between them and the children but doesn't seem to affect the kinds of responses they get: the skill lies in ensuring that each child produces his or her 'real' response.

It is the educator's sensitivity to the nature of what each child is actually saying, coupled with the quality of the follow-up questions, that is likely to produce useful responses.

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They are clearly comfortable in working with children's drawings and in moving quickly to take advantage of what comes out of them. It seems clear that they can readily go further in terms of getting at more important ideas from the children.

It doesn't much matter what the starting point is, a skilful educator can lead discussions in ways that enable topics to be explored. For example, in one centre, reciting the Little Red Riding Hood story led to the child putting herself in the heroine's place: 'She ran home so she wouldn't be frightened'.

Approaches, techniques, activities

Finding out from children can readily be incorporated into the normal programme: it doesn't need to be a special session – indeed, it may be better if it is simply introduced naturally and becomes part of the normal activities.

Approaches, techniques and activities of this sort should be planned in regularly and fit naturally within the centre's normal programme – and they should also be introduced as opportunities arise.

A fixed list of questions may provide some good starting points but should be used flexibly. Children should lead adults to what they want to explore.

Allowing children to draw something that is interesting to them and having them talk about what they have drawn allows them to express themselves. What they express may not appear in the drawings: they often reveal the content by explaining, or amplifying what they have drawn, sometimes in response to questions. In addition, as they draw they seem to be simultaneously identifying and refining their thoughts about the subject of their drawing.

Once the theme has been established, and the methodology and dynamic identified, launching and sustaining group work is relatively easy for an experienced educator: children know what to expect from their educators, and are prepared to go with them, while the educators know the children and know how to lead them through important activities.

A group of 25 seems practical, although it inevitably means that some children are left out. But it's not easy for all children to express what interests them when they are in a group: there's interference from other children's ideas which either leads to them copying the ideas of others, or to them being so swamped by what is going on around them that they express nothing.

We need to discover how these approaches, techniques and activities can be applied/developed to address more important and relevant subject matter and elicit responses from the children that are significant in programmatic terms.

Real effort is needed to develop approaches, techniques and activities that will enable programmes to follow up on what young children tell us.

I like to go because they pick me up in a boat

photo: SUMBI

The voices of children

Carmen Vásquez de Velasco

The author is Director of Servicios Urbanos y Mujeres de Bajos Ingresos (SUMBI – Urban Services and Women with Low Incomes) in Peru. SUMBI investigates and promotes education, health and culture and operates a number of programmes including one for children. This article discusses a SUMBI project that is linked to the Effectiveness Initiative and that is developing and applying an innovative way of finding out how to collect the opinions of children aged three to five. The children attend 'Wawa Utas' (Children's Houses in the Aymara language) and 'Wawa Wasis' (Children's Houses in the Quechua language) which are centres of the Programas no Escolarizados de Educación Inicial (Non-formal Initial Education Programmes).

The work described here is in two communities, one in the city of Puno in the remote and impoverished high Andes, the other in a poor suburb of the capital, Lima. As the article makes clear, the investigation is in its early stages and further development is necessary. This includes exploring deeper subjects; asking more open questions to enable fuller discussions; and – as with most of the work discussed in this edition of Early Childhood Matters *– putting value on what children express and then deciding how to act on it.*

Within early childhood programmes there have been interesting efforts to discover the voice of children. In addition, there have been many important initiatives at international level that have focused world attention on children. Among these are the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child that puts forward a vision of childhood in which children – as a right – are seen as active subjects rather than passive objects, and therefore as actors in their own learning.

However, oppression and marginalisation of childhood remain. The opinions of children are still not sought sufficiently and 'child participation' often simply means older children being allowed to take part in certain events. Those who are responsible for policies about childhood and those who design programmes may take the needs of children into account but they do so with an adult vision and understanding. Similarly, in our everyday relationships with children, in the home or in educational programmes, we tell children what will happen and we provide the ideas. We might ask them for their opinions about recreational or leisure activities but even then we mostly ignore those opinions. That means that we really don't know the answers to important questions such as: 'What do children really want?', 'Are the needs we identify the same needs that children themselves feel they have?' and 'What do they expect of us?'. But we need answers as we try to ensure that the nature and quality of young children's development opportunities is right for them.

We should remember as well, that children are already telling us what they want – although we don't seem to be listening. What father has not heard his son or daughter complain 'You said we could go to the park?' How many times have we heard a child telling us 'You never have time' or 'Daddy doesn't listen to me?' How many times do we refuse a request like 'Tell me a story please?' To these obvious examples we should also add children's hidden or less obvious messages – what they are telling us through their actions, for example.

In short, we are not listening enough to those who are in that important stage in which they develop the values with which they interpret and manage their lives. We have to ask ourselves 'What kind of human beings are we trying to build – do we want passive, inhibited, disinterested adults? Or do we want people who are proactive, interested and engaged?'

Listening: its importance for adults

We adults have had many different visions of children over the years. For example we have seen them as 'savages', 'the fruits of sin', 'empty vessels that need to be filled' or 'sponges that absorb everything'. To regard children as having rights requires a major shift of perspective. It means seeing them as growing human beings who have opinions and influence the world, as people who happen to be in a different stage in their lives. It means eliminating the view that children are apart from society and of importance only within their families – a view that, perhaps more than we assert or believe, is very convenient for many adults.

Working directly with children helps adults to achieve a shift of perspective because children show us that they have opinions and ideas, and that they are full of sincerity, spontaneity and creativity. They also constantly remind us – parents, educators, adults – that we have responsibility for their growth and well-being, and that we are human beings too. Finally, working with young children helps to keep alive that sense of 'me the child' that many of us carry in our hearts and our minds, and that helps to keep us in touch with the need to maintain a humanitarian society.

Those of us who work closely with children have to create environments and offer activities that help children learn, socialise and develop as people. As we do this, we need to find ways to listen to children so we can learn whether our approaches and methodologies are working well, whether our resources are adequate and whether we are responding to their ideas, reactions, goals and needs. But, much more important than this, we have to open ourselves up to what is important to children. We have to be sure that our sense of how well we are

doing is rooted in their sense of who they are, what they want and need, where they need to go next, how they are responding as people, and so on.

The benefits for children

As children's identities are formed, specific elements can be isolated – for example: gender, values, how they present themselves to the world, what is productive or associated with work, what is conventional or institutional, and so on. At this level, self-esteem – or valuing oneself – is the capacity that allows them (and us) to be unique and special yet still members of a social group. When we listen to children and, better still, consult them, it stimulates their sense of self-worth and the importance of their opinions.

The ways we have to help children express what they feel and what is happening in their lives – for example through symbolic games, stories, drawings, songs – are valuable tools that help us listen to children. But these tools also enable children to deal with their realities, realities that might include the absence of a father, poverty, conflicts, fears, aspirations, and problems with friends, the programme and their routines.

The importance for projects

In the course of our programmes for young children we have had interviews with authorities, family members, paraprofessionals and educationalists, all of whom have given us important information about what they consider effective programming. There was some agreement and complementarity between the views that they expressed but also some wide variation. But we now realise that it is only by adding the perceptions of children to those of the other actors that we can identify the most effective elements in our programming. When we do add children's views, a different picture emerges, one that includes respect for the community, the validation of popular knowledge, respect for the interests of children and treating children properly. It's also a picture that takes account of their reactions to educational activities and the realities of what they receive from programmes.

Of these, the most important in direct terms is knowing how children perceive the programmes and the people who work with them – knowing how effective a programme is from the point of view of the principal beneficiaries. This helps us to make any and all necessary improvements at whatever stage in a programme and at whatever level.

How we listen to children

Our work in listening to children is through educators who know them well and who believe in the value of children contributing their ideas, opinions, reactions, ideas, and so on. The educators must be well prepared. They need training in techniques and strategies – for example, to ensure that they can conduct interviews with young children that enable them to express themselves freely and fully.

The actual work centres on the use of finger puppets and a 'flannelgraph' – a piece of cloth with a texture that allows other pieces of cloth to stick to it temporarily. The flannelgraph itself is decorated to represent the children's environment and the other pieces of cloth are shaped and decorated to represent significant people and objects. The educator speaks to the children through the puppets, and the children use the flannelgraph to help them express themselves by arranging and rearranging the 'people' and 'objects'.

The children are in groups of three or four, and the core activity is the educator interviewing each of them in turn using sets of questions in Spanish and their indigenous language. These questions are about a range of topics that are closely linked to children's realities and include their daily routine, the games they play and their family. The idea is that these topics are starting points that stimulate children to express a great deal about their lives, their thoughts, their responses and their dreams. As each child is interviewed, the rest of the group watch and learn.

In practice, a working session goes like this. The educator prepares by rereading the guide, checking that all the materials are there, making sure the recorder is functioning, going through the questions, making sure that the atmosphere will be quiet and appropriate, and making sure that the session won't be interrupted. At the beginning of the session itself, she

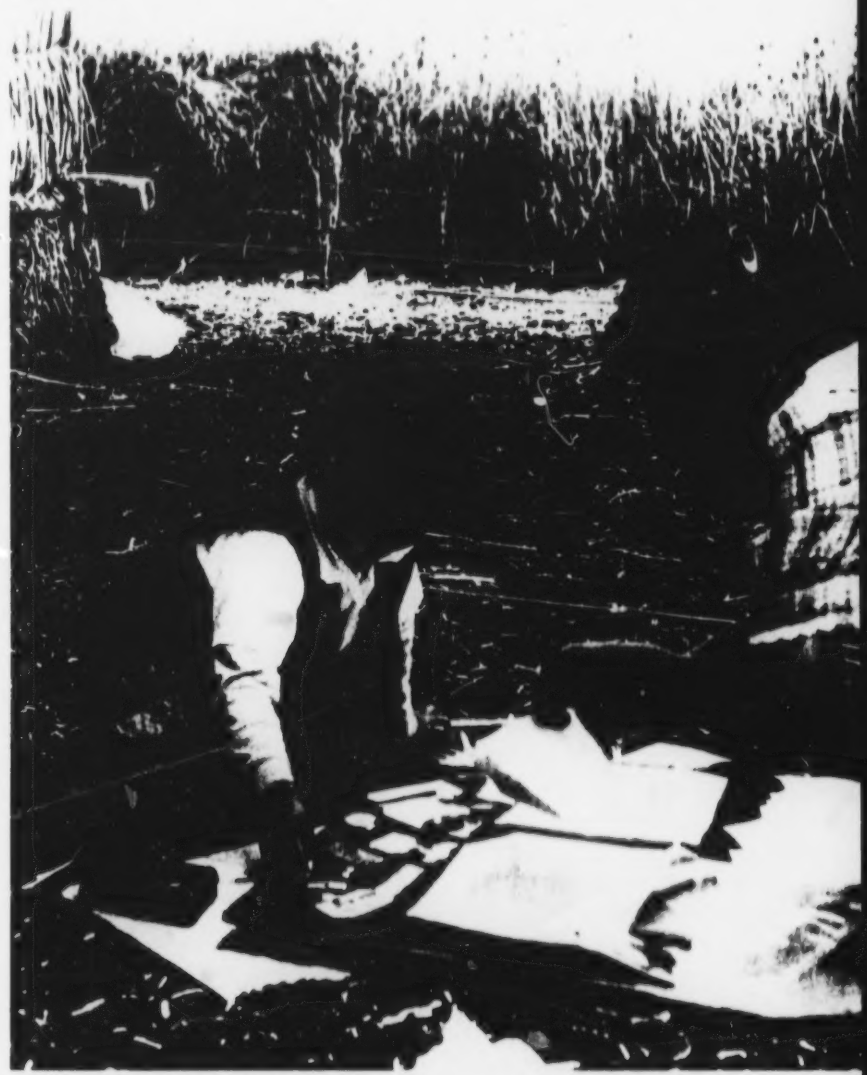
greets the children and tells them that they are going to play. She then asks the children to choose a finger puppet from a selection that she has (the educator talks to them through this puppet during the whole of the session). Then she explains the activity to them using the flannelgraph and gives the children the flannelgraph materials so they can play with them freely for a while. All the while she is using techniques to keep children interested and make them feel comfortable. These include making the puppet come alive by having it greet the children, play with them, kiss them, run and jump.

The main part of the session is helping the children to express themselves. The educator uses the flannelgraph materials to tell them a story or to create a story with them and then has the individual interviews with each child. These start with a general theme and then naturally introduce the prepared questions, linking them to three separate moments in the day of the child. Asking the questions through the puppets makes the interviews more comfortable and stimulating for the children. Using the flannelgraph helps the children to focus on what they want to say: they talk in reply to the questions, choose appropriate figures and objects, talk about them and place them on the flannelgraph as they talk. Because the figures and objects can be moved, the children can develop their stories by moving, adding or removing the figures and objects.

During this time, the educator uses more techniques to help the children. These include using interactive games in which the educator becomes another person or character; encouraging children to use their creativity; not interrupting the children; giving them time to expand on their answers; and accepting and valuing their answers instead of questioning them.

The interviews take place in the Wawa Utas and Wawa Wasis. We are also thinking about interviewing children in their own homes. The important thing is to create a relaxed setting that invites play, creativity, and free and natural expression by the children. If possible an observer is also present; and we also record the sessions. Recording is better than taking notes because it is much less intrusive which helps the educator to sustain a good atmosphere. It also

Peru: *Getting ready to talk by placing objects on the flannelgraph*
photo: SUMBI



provides a complete record that we can share with the educators and parents, and which allows us to analyse what the children have said.

As part of the process, we are collecting the children's contributions so that we can report back to them. This will show the children that their work is taken seriously, and also give them the opportunity to give their opinions about their contributions and those of their peers, to develop the ideas expressed, and to give additional information.

What children have told us so far

This work has been running for only a few months and we have not yet begun a reflexive process with the children about what they have told us. But we have already had some interesting responses from the children about their experiences in their Wawa Utas and Wawa Wasis.

- *I like my Wawa Wasi because my educator shows affection.*
- *I don't like my Wawa Wasi when the educator shouts at other children.*
- *I don't like it because the floor seems dirty to me (the floor is actually clean but it is made of a material that is new to the child).*
- *I come here to play but I don't learn anything.*

They teach me to write.

- *I come alone, no one comes with me because I live nearby.*
- *When I don't come to my Wawa Wasi, it upsets me.*
- *I like to go to my Wawa Uta because they collect me in a launch.*

Conclusions

We must not allow children to remain simple actors in a life that we adults have determined for them. The work that we are doing in trying to find out what young children think and feel, need and want, see and understand, is giving us information about young children that comes directly from them. This information may not always be new to us – for example, they tell us about the importance of affection in their lives, and about needing more care and attention – but this time it is not based on theory or outside observation, it comes directly from the source. That gives it a special power to effect change, not just here and now, but also in the long term. With the help of this kind of information, we will be better able to help young children grow with love, to feel valued, to benefit from an education that is better suited to them, to develop into people who believe that the world is good but that they can help to make it better.

The more we want to listen and are able to listen to the children, the richer our work will be. Children are very aware of what we are doing – whether good or bad. It is essential that they have opportunities to react to this, and to see that we are sensitive to their comments, suggestions and opinions. Now that we have begun to gather these data, the next step for us is to find ways to process the data so that the children's perspective can take its place in the conceptualisation and planning of programmes.

• In January 1999 the Bernard van Leer Foundation and partner organisations in the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development initiated a three year investigation known as the Effectiveness Initiative (EI). The overall goals of this initiative are to discover what we can about what makes an effective programme work, and to start an international dialogue on effectiveness that deepens our understanding of how to create and/or support effective programming for young children and families.

Early Childhood Matters 93 (October 1999) gives a very full introduction to the EI. It can be accessed at www.bernardvanleer.org and printed copies are available free of charge from the Bernard van Leer Foundation on request.

Peru: *Lively finger puppets through which the educator talks with the children*
photo: SUMBI

Philosophy for children

Critical thinking is important if we are to have a reflective citizenry in a democracy. I don't think you would like to have a soggy mass of citizens who just accept what they're told without reflection, you want them to judge what they are told in a critical way, not be uncritical. That's a terrible notion, a non critical citizenry. But conventional education is not delivering this reflective citizenry. (Dr Matthew Lipman)

Are young children really capable of making any kind of profound contribution to areas such as the conceptualisation and evaluation of early childhood development (ECD) programmes? Do they have the powers of investigation, perception, reflection and analysis that seem necessary? Can their obvious creativity be employed usefully? Dr Matthew Lipman believes that the answer to questions like these is 'Yes!' and, for the last 25 years, he has been showing how these capacities and powers can be developed.

He takes the view that education should produce individuals who are intellectually flexible, resourceful and judicious, and who have the concepts and thinking skills that could be identified as being most likely to develop a democratic citizenry. If it is to do so, it must start with young children. Lipman therefore produced the 'Philosophy for Children' programme, designed to help children from preschool age upwards to engage in critical enquiry, and creative and caring thinking. The programme emphasises the excitement of discovery, reflection and analysis through helping the children to create what he calls 'a community of enquiry' that allows children to explore and better understand their world, other people, and themselves.

The programme is based on age-specific sets of stories about everyday happenings in the lives of children. Storylines raise philosophical questions in the children's normal language, and in the ways that children might talk about issues and ideas. The first step is to share a story with a class of children by reading it aloud. The teacher then asks for comments and questions and the children choose an aspect of the story that is relevant to them and that they are really interested in talking about. The heart of the work is then a discussion between the children that the teacher helps them to generate and sustain by asking questions and seeking answers among themselves.

The discussion may naturally meander, so the teacher has to keep it within the 'norms of philosophical enquiry'. In effect, these are rules and guidelines and, especially with young children, it is useful to explain the need for these rules and guidelines, to have them spelled out and to show children how they keep within them – or not. These rules/guidelines include keeping to the topic under discussion, questioning assumptions, giving reasons for opinions and ideas, relating their ideas to those of other children, and so on. At the end of the session, a statement is produced about where the children have reached in their enquiry, and the teacher may then follow up the discussion with complementary activities.

For the teacher, the work is supported by a manual that contains suggestions for dealing with the kinds of questions that might be raised, and exercises that help children to explore the questions that interest them. The programme is flexible: for example, the stories can be rewritten – or new stories can be produced – to suit local cultural and physical realities; and the manual serves as a guide, not as an instruction book. It is also a long term programme: results are cumulative.

The examples that follow show how it has been implemented, and with what results, with three to six year olds in Iceland (page 36) and among six year olds in the USA (page 40).

Details about the Philosophy for Children programme can be found at http://chss2.montclair.edu/ict and obtained from

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Philosophy for Children in action: Iceland

Ingibjorg Sigurthorsdottir

As an administrator in Foldaborg preschool in Reykjavik, Iceland, the author introduced a two year programme for all children aged from three to six years, based on the 'Philosophy for Children' ideas of Dr Matthew Lipman (see page 35). The programme was designed to help young children to exercise and develop their ability to engage in investigations, debates and discussions. The original point of the programme was to provide young children with the means to resolve conflicts amongst themselves. The specific goals were to increase children's respect for each other, thereby lowering the risk of persecution later on; to develop better relations between children; to increase creative and critical thought among them; to increase their understanding of themselves and their own thoughts; and to increase their respect for the opinions of others. Ingibjorg Sigurthorsdottir is now a preschool counsellor for 12 preschools in Reykjavik

Foldaborg is one of 71 preschools operated by the city of Reykjavik. It is for about 90 children aged from one to six years old, and they spend between four and nine hours there, five days a week. As in all Icelandic preschools, only about 40 percent of the personnel are qualified teachers, the remainder are assistants.

When I got to know about Dr Matthew Lipman's ideas of using philosophy with young children, I saw it as a way to open up children's minds: too often they are told what to think and do but not why. The Philosophy for Children approach increases children's respect for others while giving them a chance to be listened to, in an environment in which their opinion counts – there is no right answer, so they don't have to worry about saying something wrong. In Foldaborg, we were specifically interested in helping children find better ways of solving their problems, and we recognised that philosophy can help them to look into their own mind and search for their own opinions and feelings. We therefore developed the first Philosophy for Children programme for preschool children in Iceland.

When I first discussed this idea in a staff meeting, most members of staff were very excited although some were scared – mostly, I think because it was called philosophy. But as soon as we started the preparation everyone took part with joy and excitement. As we started the preparation, we introduced the idea to parents who were also very excited. We didn't introduce it to the children until we were ready to work with them.

Preparing the staff

We decided to use a whole year to prepare the staff. We needed to know more about philosophy and methods of introducing philosophy to children and about working with them in philosophical ways. At the personal level, we needed to open our own minds and become more capable of communicating in a philosophical way. Last but not least, we also needed to practise leading discussion groups with children.

To help us on these matters we got in touch with a philosopher called Sigurdur Bjornsson. He was just as excited as we and worked with us both during the preparation year, and throughout the whole two years of the operation of the project. Right from the start we decided that we did not want to depend only on the discussion groups, although these are very important. Instead we wanted to change the whole environment of our daily work in Foldaborg and base it on the philosophical approach. This meant that everyone had to be aware of how to talk with children, how to handle conflicts, how to encourage the children to seek answers for themselves and how to ensure that everybody respects each other's opinions.

Sigurdur led a two hour training session every two weeks and also two full days of further training and preparation. There were two areas in which we needed training: 1) in philosophical thinking generally, and in the Philosophy for Children programme – this was for everyone; and 2) in leading discussion groups – this was for a group of eight preschool teachers.

After the training, staff found that they needed to keep on discussing philosophy among themselves, so personnel in each class met one evening a month in their homes to do this. This was their own initiative, in their own time and it was unpaid.

As an administrator and the co-leader of the project along with Sigurdur, I was very pleased with this interest and commitment from the staff.

When the preparation time was over, and before starting the work with the children, we introduced the project properly to the parents. They were still excited and remained very enthusiastic throughout. In the beginning I was concerned that they would find it hard to deal with their children asking them the kinds of questions that necessarily arise in the Philosophy for Children approach – for example, questions about reasons and justifications for what they should do and should not do. But I never heard a parent express any negative reactions to the programme or to Philosophy for Children. On the contrary, parents often came to me to say how pleased they were with the progress that their children were making.

The discussion groups with children

Every child from three to six years old participated four times a week for 30 minutes each time. They were split into seven groups of between eight and ten children, with a teacher and an observer. We thought it was very important that they stayed in the same groups with the same adults because it would increase their comfort, trust and sense of security. We had certain rules such as raising a hand when they wanted to make a contribution, sitting still, listening to other children, waiting their turn and concentrating; and we also had rules to keep the discussion on course.

Every discussion time started the same way and ended the same way. The children sat in a circle along with the teacher, and they would hold hands and say something like 'Welcome to discussion time' (the actual welcome varied from group to group). Then the teacher would introduce the topic for the discussion. This was usually drawn from a story called 'Bullukolla'. This was written by Sigurdur Bjornsson for the project, and it is built up along the lines developed by Matthew Lipman in his series of books for the Philosophy for Children programme in the USA. That is to say, it tells a story in a way that highlights situations, events, problems and so on, and allows them to be analysed and discussed by children so that they can develop their powers of critical thinking, bringing in their own experiences and ideas as they do so.

Bullukolla is an Icelandic story about an Icelandic girl, and we use it because it is culturally more appropriate than a translated American story. The story is about a girl of five years called Gudrun – a very common Icelandic name – but she is called Bullukolla (the nonsense girl) because she is always asking strange questions, making peculiar statements and wondering about various things in life. The story is divided into short chapters, each of which is followed by questions and exercises related to the story that the teacher can use to help to develop the discussion.

When using 'Bullukolla' we started the session by reading a chapter to the children. Then we asked them if they found anything strange or funny in the story and if they had a question to ask. Each question was written on a board on the wall along with the name of the child who 'owned' the question. When everyone had asked the questions they wanted to, we started to work on each question, trying to get every child to express to the others what was in their mind: what interested them; how it related to their own experiences; what questions it provoked in them; and so on. As this happened, other children commented on what had been said, and, with the help of the teacher, a discussion developed. As well as Bullukolla we also used other material to encourage children towards creative critical thinking and discussions – for example, pictures, plays, things that had happened in the school or in their homes. Before ending the discussion, the teacher helped the children to sum up what they had said. At the end of the session, all the children held hands again and together said something like 'Thank you for the discussion'.

The children asked many hundreds of questions during the project. These included:

Is it possible not to know anything?
Is there something that never changes?
Is it possible to know if one really exists?
What is it that controls us?
What is living?

Iceland: *Obeying the rules helps proper debate among young children*
photo: Ingibjorg Sigurthorsdottir

We worked with the children on these questions, getting them to think about them, to form an opinion and argue their case. The children could disagree – we were not searching for one particular answer – and they also learned both to accept a valid argument and protest at a weak one, and to accept the right of others to have their own opinions.

Monitoring progress

We held staff meetings every month to discuss general progress, and the job of the observer was to help monitor the progress of each child in each group. We found that the children showed great progress in most areas. For example, only 38 percent participated in the discussions at the beginning of the project but that grew to 95 percent; and, while only 2 percent of the children could argue their case at the beginning, 71 percent were able to do so later on. The observer also monitored how well the children kept to the rules – something they actually did very well. In the beginning some children were insecure about asking their own questions – for example, they said they wanted to ask the same question that another group member had done. At first we just added their name to that question, but after a few weeks we insisted that they came up with their own questions if they wanted their names on the board.

The only area where children made little or no progress was in generalising: they couldn't do that by themselves but the teachers did this at the end of some discussions.

We assembled our overall conclusions about the effects of the project on children under the different headings set out below.

The children improved their skills in asking questions
The ability to ask relevant questions is a very important skill in the comprehension of every subject. In a philosophical discussion, children are encouraged to ask questions and are helped to formulate their questions by the teachers and their peers if they have problems. This questioning process appeared to be fruitful because at the end of the year, the children expressed their doubts in direct questions that were much more easily comprehended by their peers. In the beginning it always took some time to figure out what the children were really asking.

The children stated their opinions much more easily
Most of the children put their shyness behind them and became very competent at saying what they thought. Some were very shy in the beginning and did not want to participate but got to enjoy the discussions by the end.

The children improved their ability to find reasons
Reasons are the cornerstones of philosophical discussion. In the beginning the children had difficulties in finding reasons but after the philosophical training they improved their ability to support their judgements with reasons.

They disagreed with each other
In the philosophical discussion we put emphasis on the interrelations between the children themselves. The idea was to move from child-teacher to child-child discussions. Therefore the children were encouraged to speak directly to the one they agreed or disagreed with. After a while, this kind of communication happened frequently and the children started to settle their disagreements by themselves.

They started being able to correct themselves
One of the main characteristics of critical thinking is that it corrects itself. In the beginning of the training the teacher had to point out the disagreements and contradictions but as the children became more used to the process they started to correct themselves. Frequently, children raised their hands and said that they had changed their mind and, after a time, they could even say why. Often, this was because they had listened carefully to their peers.

They became more tolerant and involved in the discussion, and their concentration as they listened to their peers became much better
To start with, many of the children lacked tolerance and were easily carried away from the subject. They didn't know what the discussion was about and expressed views that were

not related to the subject. Very often they raised their hand to say something but had forgotten what it was by the time it was their turn to speak. Later they could concentrate better and follow the discussion more easily. They listened more carefully to each other and they could wait longer to express their own views.

They became more ready to help each other in the discussion

One of the ethical aspects of discussion is the readiness to help others to express their views and find reasons for them. This was a focus in the discussions and children developed the desire to help each other. Their help might be in the form of interpreting an idea that was unclear, finding reasons for an opinion or finding examples that threw light on the opinions of others. In this process the children learned the joy of helping others and also learned to accept the help of others.

Discussion became a tool for conflict resolution

Both staff and parents reported that the children became much more ready to give reasons for their opinions or wants; and seemed more able to use discussions to settle differences with other children.

Differences in participation between boys and girls decreased

A very interesting factor is that the difference in the participation between boys and girls almost disappeared. In the beginning the boys were much more active than the girls but in the end the girls had caught up.

The views of the parents

From the beginning we were anxious that the parents were with us, so we also discussed with them what changes they had observed in their children. Generally parents felt that their children talked with them in a different way. Many explained further:

- *She is more open-minded and realises that her opinion is not always the right one.*
- *He speaks about everything that frightens him or that he finds beautiful; he talks about everything between heaven and earth.*
- *He is better able to talk about things and argue his case, and he demands the same from others.*
- *She doesn't like answers like 'maybe' or 'possibly', she wants clear answers and reasons for everything.*

Conclusions

Introducing the Philosophy for Children programme was difficult in the beginning because staff members were handling situations that were new to both them and the children. But progress was obvious after a very short time and that was a constant reward and stimulus. The responses from the parents were very rewarding also: most of them were very excited about the project. We also had very positive responses from outside Foldaborg preschool, including a lot of phonecalls and visits from teachers and other people who wanted to know more about – and see – what we were doing.

Personally, I found that working on this project was very demanding but at the same time very exciting and rewarding. I wanted to be as much involved in the work with the children as I could so I had my own discussion group to lead. It's a great experience to see a girl who in the beginning hardly said a word, or a boy who always took the word of others and had difficulties in sitting still, become active and confident members of a discussion group that is dealing with important and complex matters.

The teachers in Foldaborg are still working on philosophy with the children, and are doing very well. Nowadays it has become a very natural, important part of the curriculum and the school is well known for this work, both by parents as they select schools for their children and by professionals. Also, since the project in Foldaborg I have given many lectures introducing Philosophy for Children and it has now been taken up by other schools with similarly impressive results.

Some parts of this article originally appeared in the article 'Philosophy for Children in Foldaborg: Development Project in Foldaborg, a preschool in Reykjavik, Iceland, for children from 1-6 years' by Ingibjorg Sigurthorsdottir, first published in OMEP *International Journal of Early Childhood*, Volume 30, No. 1, 1998; OMEP World Organisation for Early Childhood and Education, IOE/PPE Institute of Education, University of London, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1A 0HH, England.

Philosophy for Children in action: USA

In 1996 the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) made a film that included work with young children in Tuscon School, New Jersey, USA, called 'Socrates for six year olds'. It was produced and directed by Anne Paul. The film catches fascinating scenes of open dialogue between six year old children. For example, just five months after the introduction of the programme, it shows children's ability to address an individual's sense of self, and relate that to the location of thinking in the body. It also shows that young children can sustain dialogues between themselves with minimal intervention by their teacher. In this example, the teacher's interventions are in italics.

- Elfie always thinks a lot, that's why she doesn't talk a lot.
- I agree with Joanne, because your brain is for learning and it's powerful.
- *So you don't agree with Clarissa who says it's you who thinks, and not your brain? That's an interesting thing to say Clarissa.*
- I disagree with Clarissa, because if you didn't have a brain, you wouldn't be even thinking of the words that I am talking right now. So, it would be impossible without your brain.
- I think it could be possible because you have a heart, and a heart can beat, and it could think it's beating.
- I disagree with Teresa, because if your heart beats, that's just your heart beating. You don't know if your heart thinks.
- *You don't know if your heart thinks?*
- If you have your brain like we do, you know all the thoughts.
- I agree with Teresa, because you think and your brain stores your thoughts.
- *So, it's really you who's doing the thinking?*
- Well, if you didn't have a brain, you would say, What's that? What's that? What's that?
- How would you know what's happening? And how would you know how to spell the word if you didn't think about the word?
- You wouldn't know anything, so you wouldn't know what you are saying, so you don't know it.
- It's like, well, I don't even know what that is. And you don't even know where you are.
- You couldn't even talk, because you don't know what the words are.
- If you didn't have a brain, you would die. Because if you wouldn't have a brain you would keep falling down, and you would really go into the street and you would get run over. So, you would be immediately dead if you didn't have a brain.
- I disagree with Christian because you could walk ...
- ... your brain wouldn't tell you that you can walk. I am thinking that I've got to talk and if I didn't have a brain, then I wouldn't be talking. If I didn't have a brain, I couldn't hear you and I wouldn't be here and I wouldn't be at school and I wouldn't be doing anything. I wouldn't be alive.
- When people grow up, get really old they wouldn't know anything, because they've used up all of their thoughts.
- *Lauren do you agree with Patrick that you can use up all your thoughts when you're young and wouldn't have enough anymore?*
- You can use up all your thoughts because sometimes I have thoughts and I forget them and I don't have anymore for the rest of the day.
- I disagree with Lauren because you always have thoughts and everybody has thoughts. There's never no thought or only one thought in the world.

In the BBC film, Catherine McCall, the teacher of the Philosophy for Children programme in Tuscon School, explained the approach:

> *You create a situation in which the child generates philosophy. It's the children who create the ideas they find interesting, not the ones that the adults find interesting – and that is*

tremendously exciting for children. They are not nearly as frightened of the risk of intellectual adventure as an adult is.

This demonstration of the capabilities of six year old children invites the question 'What next?'. In practical terms: how do preschools and schools acknowledge these, develop them further, build on them? What impact should such abilities have on the ways in which children are regarded, on how childhood is conceptualised? What impact should such abilities have on how programmes are devised, operated and evaluated. ○

For details of *Secrets for six year olds* and other BBC programmes and publications please contact:
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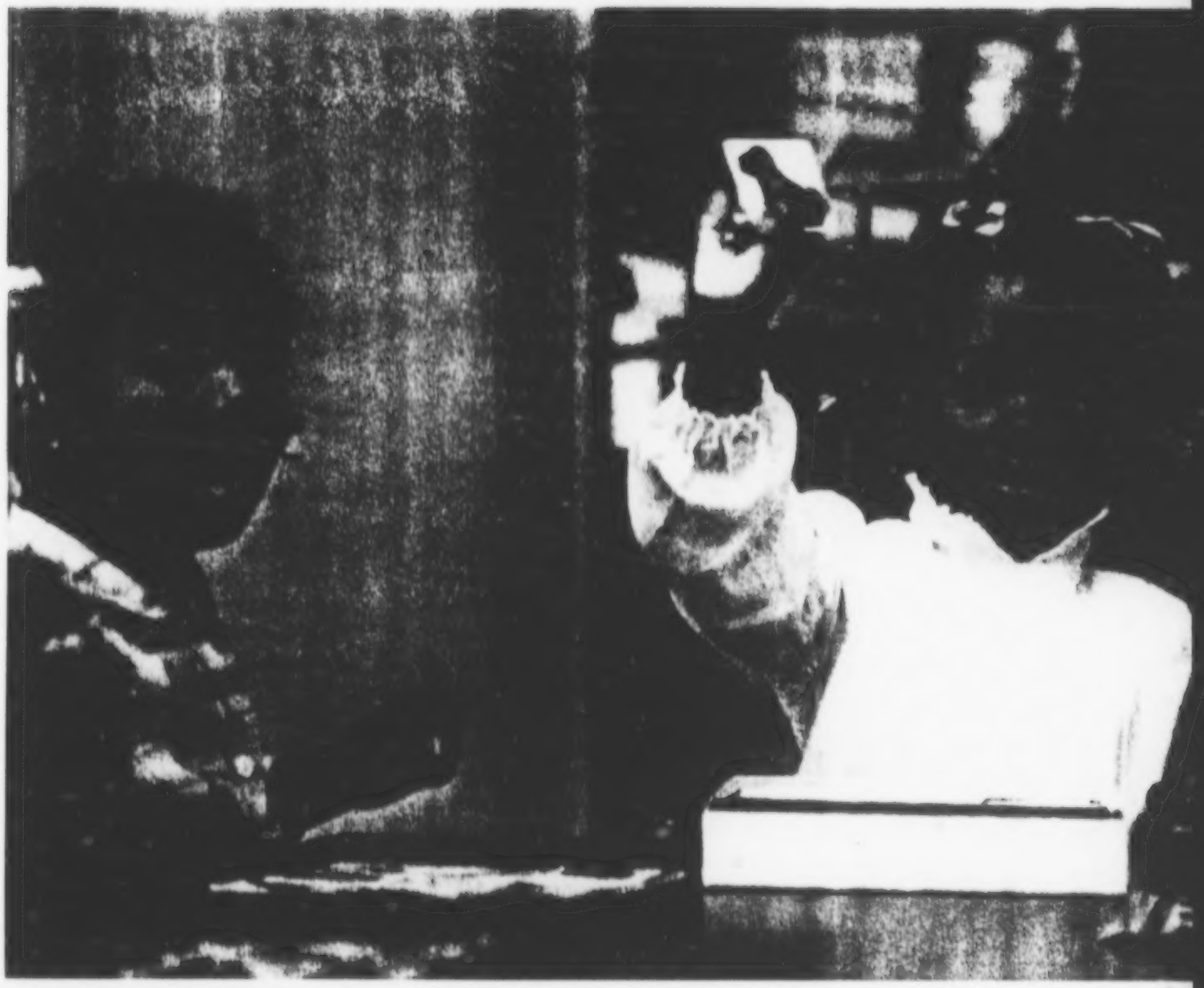

USA Alabama Day Care Services project: *Fully engaged*
photo: FOCAL

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New publications from the Foundation

Espacio para la Infancia

Durante este pasado mes de enero, la Bernard van Leer Foundation ha sacado a la luz *Espacio para la Infancia*, una nueva publicación que, si bien presentada con un nuevo diseño, supone la continuación del anterior *Boletín Informativo*. Dirigida a las comunidades de habla hispana y portuguesa, se presenta como un punto de encuentro donde poder tratar, exponer y profundizar sobre todos aquellos temas de interés y experiencias sobre el desarrollo de la primera infancia.

Español/Portugués. Edición semestral. 44 páginas (ISSN 1566-6476).

Teresa Moreno
Editor

Last year, saw the redesign of both the Foundation's series, the 'Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections' series and the 'Working Papers in Early Childhood Development' series.

The Cynon Valley Project: investing in the future

The Cynon Valley in Wales (UK) is struggling with the consequences of economic decline. With funding from Save the Children Fund and the Bernard van Leer Foundation, the Cynon Valley Project started work in two communities. The Project's focus was on early childhood work and community development. Although starting at about the same time and under similar conditions, the two communities developed in completely different directions. One community continued its early childhood work, among other activities, while the second concentrated on community action. Through the voices of parents, community workers, and childcare workers, this booklet charts the development of the work in both communities and analyses why their directions diverged so radically. The thread that underpins this study is that the people making up communities must have the strings of development in their own hands to pull themselves and others in the direction that they decide is important. Equally, funding agencies must be prepared to be flexible and react to changes in direction if real development is to take place.

The Cynon Valley Project: investing in the future is number 12 in the 'Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections series'. It was published in October 1999 (ISBN 90-6195-051-1).

Childrearing in Hubai Village, China

Childrearing in Hubai Village, China summarises the findings of research carried out by staff of the China National Institute for Educational Research which runs the Foundation supported Hebei Preschool Education Project. The research looked into the childrearing practices of a small village in the province of Hebei in Northern China. The project will use the research findings to tailor its future work to local conditions.

Childrearing in Hubai Village, China is number 25 in the 'Working Papers in Early Childhood Development series'. It was published in December 1999 (ISBN 90-6195-054-6).

Valuing evaluation: a practical approach to designing an evaluation that works for you
Alain Thomas

Valuing evaluation is based on an evaluation workshop that took place in Tel Aviv, Israel, in May 1997. As the workshop participants included staff

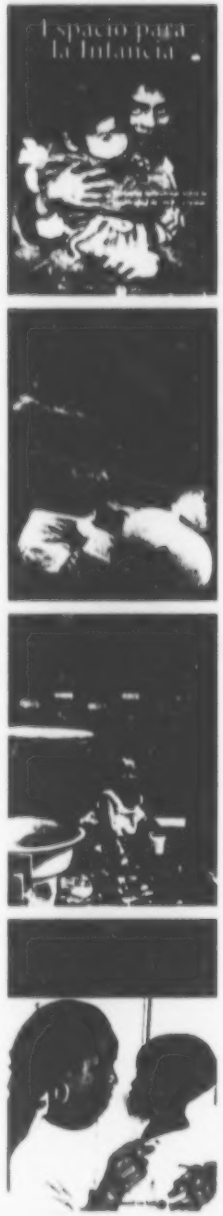
from 11 projects, the discussions centred around very practical issues. The participants looked at what is evaluation, different types of evaluation, why people evaluate, the aims of evaluation and so on. As this paper recounts the findings of the workshop, it is very practical.

This paper is particularly useful to project staff and resource centres, and is of great interest to project directors, policy makers, and academics.

Valuing evaluation: a practical approach to designing an evaluation that works for you is number 26 in the 'Working Papers in Early Childhood Development' series. It was published in February 2000 (ISBN 90-6195-055-4).

Joanna Bouma
Series Editor

Single copies of these publications are available free of charge from the Foundation at the addresses inside the front cover and on the back cover. A list of all the publications in both the Early Childhood Development: Practice and Reflections series and the Working Papers in Early Childhood Development series is available from the Series Editor.



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The Bernard van Leer Foundation

Investing in the development of young children

Winner of the 1999 Poster Competition

As they roam home in the shrubby plains, shepherd boys, five to eight years, tend their shoats (sheep and goats).

The winning photograph of the 1999 Poster Competition comes from Ltc in the Samburu district of Kenya. It was taken by Andrew Lanyasunya and submitted by the 'Ebarta Child and Family' project, which is part of the Foundation supported 'Community based ECD in Samburu' programme.

Congratulations to the winner and many thanks to all those who participated.

Copies of the poster are available free of charge from the Foundation at the addresses shown below.

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Early Childhood Matters

the bulletin of the Bernard van Leer Foundation

JUNE 2010 NO 95

Bernard van Leer Foundation

Parents and ECD programmes

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Bernard van Leer Foundation

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Cover

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As well as *Early Childhood Matters* the Foundation produces a wide range of publications about early childhood development. All are available – free of charge for single copies – to organisations or individuals interested in this field. A publications list is also available: please contact the Foundation at the addresses above and on the back cover.

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Parents and ECD programmes

There's a view that parents (which here means children's closest caregivers – perhaps members of their extended families) can take on important roles in ECD projects and programmes and fulfil them well. This assumes that they have the time and energy to do so despite the fact that they are overloaded by their struggle to sustain the viability of their families; that their life opportunities and experiences have left them with the necessary vision, confidence and skills; and that the agencies that operate or administer early childhood development (ECD) programmes welcome them as partners. There's also a view that parents just want to pass their children over to programmes; that they lack the interest or expertise to directly support their children's development; and that programmes can only be conceived, directed and operated by trained and experienced personnel.

Examples of both of these views of parents and their involvement in programmes can be readily found. In some cultures or agencies, parent initiated – often informal – childcare programmes are the norm, often as continuations of local practices that have existed for generations. In other agencies or cultures, there is an insistence on maintaining a degree of professionalism that excludes parents from any real control.

In a discussion about parental involvement it is important to keep in mind that children depend on the love, care and security that those in parenting roles most naturally provide. Parents are also children's first educators, with the responsibility for making sure that children have the safe, rich development environments that they need if they are to flourish. Given these facts, where and to what extend do and should parents fit into ECD programmes? This edition of *Early Childhood Matters* explores this question, reflecting on practice around such topics as: what roles do parents have and why? What helps to determine these roles? How and under what circumstances do parents complement, support– even take over – roles that are often earmarked for trained child development workers? How is their participation viewed by other stakeholders; how is it fostered; how is it constrained?

It is tempting to judge parental involvement in programmes on the basis of the quantity and nature of what parents do. But such an approach is misguided because, as Judith Evans shows (page 7), there are many different ways in which parents participate in ECD programmes and any one of them could be right in its context. Although she suggests a continuum of involvement that ranges from parents as passive receivers of goods or services through to parents as instigators and sustainers of their own programmes, she points out that many factors determine participation. These factors include parental characteristics, the opportunities and experiences parents have had, the culture within which a project is being developed, the point in time within the project that parent participation is being defined, the attitudes and philosophies of all those involved, and so on. Therefore, if you want a measure of quality, you should look at how well a programme addresses these factors, and how successful it has been in ensuring that parental participation has developed as fully as is possible in the circumstances. In this respect, her article includes many examples of good practice.

The second article in this edition is by Yvonne de Graaf, Bert Prinsen and Mieke Vergeer (page 18) and deals with parent participation of a very particular kind. Here, the importance of the knowledge and skills of experienced mothers is recognised, and a support programme for new mothers has been built up around this knowledge and those skills. The programme is called Moeders Informeren Moeders (MIM – Mothers Inform Mothers) and, as the article shows, is put into practice with the experienced mothers themselves.

Philippines: *child to child activities in a family based setting*
Community of Learners Foundation Project
photo: Ferny de los Angeles Bautista/Lourdes I Aldecoa

Using a variety of approaches, aids and techniques, they explore important areas of child healthcare and development with the new mothers, and also focus on the new mothers' well-being. The success of this kind of parental involvement lies in understanding that people can learn readily and happily from trusted members of their own communities. It also depends on bringing out and valuing what people know, understand and can do, and on finding ways in which all of this can be shared with those who could benefit from it. And, as with so much else in the development field, the MIM approach is not fixed or static: each implementation is geared to specific target groups that include urban communities, rural populations, migrants, refugees and travelling people.

In Winnipeg, Canada, the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Programme, discussed by Rachel Lawrenchuk, Carol DH Harvey and Mark Berkowitz (page 24), shows how to bring parents into the heart of a programme that operates in one of the poorest urban constituencies in Canada. Families living in the neighbourhood are at risk due to inadequate health, housing, employment and education provisions; while safety and the quality of personal relationships are also significant factors. Against this background, project staff felt that the only possible approach was to acknowledge the harsh realities of people's lives and respond to them by working alongside parents and caregivers. This implies certain attitudes on the part of the staff: for example, a commitment to the ideas of real partnership between staff and parents, and to the

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policy of aboriginal control of aboriginal health and education. To make these attitudes concrete, the programme ensures that the centre, and the nature and content of the programme itself, develops as the parents and children themselves develop. The broad aim is to foster the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical growth of the young aboriginal children living in the community. As basic strategies, the programme recognises and supports extended families, and focuses on sustaining healthy personal growth and development in parents as well as children, and helps parents to generate success for themselves.

In her article on page 30, Joanna Bouma reflects on the roles of parents in programmes for young children, as she observed them during a recent working visit to the Samburu ECD Project in Northern Kenya. The project supports a number of early childhood development programme, and this article describes a 'typical' programme – actually an amalgamation of different programmes scattered across a very harsh and isolated part of the country. What she saw was impressive: parents as initiators, controllers and operators of their children's ECD programmes; the project as an enabler and facilitator responding to parents' needs. The project provides technical support but the parents define its roles: nobody tells the parents what to do with their children; and nobody tells them what support they need – they decide for themselves and then seek it when they are ready. This is a first class example of what parents can do: they have taken an old tradition and adapted it to suit modern circumstances. And they keep it going themselves. This is all done in an unpromising environment in which community members are already overtaxed just to survive.

Complementing these articles are a series of extracts from interviews with parents and decision makers in Nicaragua (page 37). Especially interesting are the views of parents about their own roles and how they have experienced them. What emerges is a complex picture of determination overcoming reticence and inexperience; of sympathetic support based on the potential that parents have; of dealing with complexities by always taking practical approaches; of building a body of success by being realistic; and – now – having aspirations that once would have seemed impossible to them. It is results like these that help to account for the enthusiasm for parental participation that is revealed in the extracts from interviews with decision makers that conclude the article. This enthusiasm is given practical expression in the national plan to enhance parental roles in the development of their children that is outlined by Nicaragua's Director of Preschool Education.

Overall, the articles review the subject extensively, and also offer impressive examples of what parents can and do achieve if their potential is encouraged to blossom. In doing this, the articles invite us to look closely at the reasons why parental participation varies so widely. Specific questions may arise about whether we always listen enough to parents and whether we always understand who we are working with. Do we sometimes miss what they can do? And, if so, is it because it does not suit us, or because we have preconceptions or prejudices? Do we sometimes crush potential, or undervalue or ignore it? Do we always know how much power we hold, and do we consider how much that fairly reflects what parents could do? Do we know when we should step back into genuinely enabling and supportive roles? It is only when we ask these questions of ourselves and try to answer them honestly, that we can really begin to claim that we are taking parental participation seriously.

The October edition of *Early Childhood Matters* will consist of a collection of articles about the progress of the Effectiveness Initiative. This is a three year investigation into what makes an effective project work, that was launched in January 1999 by the Foundation and partner organisations in the Consultative group on Early Childhood Care and Development. The articles will review progress so far and survey a range of significant topics that are emerging. *Early Childhood Matters'* coverage of the Effectiveness Initiative began in the October 1999 edition. This can be accessed at www.bernardvanleer.org and copies are available on request.

Jim Smale
Editor

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Parent participation: what's it about?

Judith L Evans

The author is the Director of the Department of Programme Documentation and Communication of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. In this article she draws on many years of direct experience to look at the different ways that parents are included in ECD programmes, and to show the benefits that are known to accrue to parents, children and the programmes themselves from that participation. She also surveys factors that determine the nature and extent of parental participation; and reviews what helps and what hinders participation.

One of the hottest topics in the ECD field is parent participation. It is lauded as a key to having effective programmes, so it is listed as a component in project proposals and included as part of the design of new initiatives. But what does parent participation really mean? A review of ECD projects reveals a wide range of participation by parents, from being recipients of services through to being instigators and controllers of programmes. To get a broad sense of the nature and degree of their participation, this range can usefully be seen as a continuum from passive to very active roles, with a complementary continuum for the enabling agency.

Some notional points on this continuum are indicated in the table.

Extent and nature of parent participation		Complementary roles of enabling agency
parents receive goods/services	↓	agency supplies goods/services to parents on the basis of the agency's perception of what parents need
parents participate in the delivery of services	↓	agency and parents supply goods/services, as determined by the agency
parents participate in establishing the foci of programmes	↓	agency discusses needs with parents then decides what will be offered
parents and agency jointly determine all aspects of the programme	↓	agency and parents jointly determine all aspects of the programme
parents define and operate programmes		agency makes services/funds available, in response to parents' requests

Benefits of parental participation

There is powerful evidence to demonstrate that parental participation has wide benefits for the parents themselves, for their children and for ECD programmes. And, although they are discussed separately, interests and benefits are frequently mutual.

Benefits for parents

Through their participation, many mothers and other caregivers in the community have gained confidence in recognising how, when and where they can support their children's development in their everyday lives. This has important implications for the caregivers' sense of worth. In a review of evaluations of the impact of parental participation in ECD programmes conducted by Myers and Hertenberg (1987), they note that changes in the adults were evidenced

Kenya: Ledero Manyatta ECD activity centre: *in the hands of the parents*
Samburu ECD Project
photo: Joanna Bouma.

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by different attitudes and actions in terms of the way they talked about the project, reached agreements, and acted on decisions. Overall,

> The basic change identified was from apathy to participation in constructive activities as a sense of self-worth was strengthened.[1]

An evaluation of parent groups in Bangladesh (Akhtar, 1998) echoes the above findings.[2] The evaluation included interviews of participants and staff, data were gathered on participants' feelings, and observations were made of parent group sessions to determine the quality of participation. The results provided very positive feedback, including:

- that parents felt honoured and important when they realised that cultural practices are really valuable in supporting children's development;
- that parents realise what an impact they have on their child's development. A participant stated: *I never knew I was doing so much to help my daughter grow up strong and clever. Now I know I can really help her have chances I never had.*

For those parents who have become active agents for change in their communities, wider personal and community benefits are also clear, as a survey of the women involved in the Rehlahlilwe Project in South Africa[3] shows:

> *We have become 'social workers' in our community. Some say we are preachers – it's OK, they have learned to take care of their children, which is all we ever wanted.*
>
> *A lot of people come to my house for help and they trust us with their problems.*

Women are also confident enough now to help caregivers access services, and their new knowledge gives them confidence to speak out for children in their communities:

> *We are never able to keep quiet when someone is doing something wrong to children. Some people will hate you for talking out but we [don't worry about] this and only find the child being important to us.*

In addition, involvement with the project has helped women at a personal level.

> *I've not only learned to work and respect the children I work with, but my family life improved as well. I relate much better to my husband than I used too. Had it not been for this programme I would have not been here by now; I would have left my family or my husband and I would be divorced. I was saved by implementing what I learned, for instance I improved communication between me and my family and understand why people do the things they do to others and why certain people behave in a certain way.*

In summary, a parent's own development can be greatly enhanced by participation and many move along the participation continuum over time, taking more responsibility for aspects of programmes as their confidence and experience grows. Also, there are many examples of parents from ECD programmes becoming involved in wider ranging development programmes in their communities. This echoes common experience in the development field as a whole.

Benefits for children

Benefits for children are seldom evaluated through direct assessment of the children. Rather, the possible benefits for children are revealed through parents' perceptions of changes in their children. For example, the Alliance Project in Guatemala[4] uses as one of their impact indicators that fathers and mothers understand the benefits and importance of incorporating the traditional ways of stimulating children with the new techniques that enrich and reinforce their integrated development. To the programme implementers, success occurs when parents are able to observe changes in children. Comments to demonstrate their understanding include:

> *Now he is not afraid to go to school. They feel more secure.*
> *Now they are not afraid to speak to other people.*

According to the child's growth, he is changing his way of thinking.
His father spends more time with him.
She is not afraid to participate, she is animated.
She can write more easily.

Once parents realise how important their role is in supporting the child's development, several evaluations reveal that there is a change in the parent's behaviour, particularly in terms of their interactions with their children. But change is not easy:

I should say things were really tough at first – I found it very difficult to change from what I was: very violent and intolerant. I found it hard to change and listen to my children and practise what I learned at Rehlahlilwe.[5]

Benefits for programmes

The more parents participate in the programme and its development, the more the programme is likely to be appropriate to its context, and therefore more effective in reaching its goals. For programmes to be appropriate and ultimately viable, parents are key. At the most basic level, early childhood programmes could not exist without parents because parents choose whether or not their children will participate in an ECD setting. Looking at the youngest children – those aged up to two or three – the only ways in which programmes are likely to reach them are through parents. Taking the broader view, parents are seen as great assets to programmes, especially as they move from relative passivity to more active roles.

Determinants of parental participation

It's important not to make judgements about parent participation. There are many reasons why parents participate in the ways and to the extent that they do, many of which are associated with interacting factors and variables that are well understood and respected. There are at least three kinds of variables: contextual, programmatic and personal.

Contextual

The nature of parenting today
In both Majority World countries and industrialised nations, conditions, demands and expectations of families have shifted tremendously over the last twenty years. Whereas in the past, most societies could claim a normalised parenting pattern – an extended family model, a community/tribal model, a nuclear family or some other stable pattern – now most societies are reporting that their family norms are disrupted, and the effects on children and parents alike are devastating. As a result, the on-the-job training many parents used to receive from extended family members or from religious and cultural traditions is largely unavailable to contemporary parents.

Added to this, it is not always clear who is providing the parenting. It is generally taken for granted that the primary caregivers are the child's biological parents, but this assumption is not always valid. Apart from cultural norms and practices, for an ever-increasing number of the world's children, biological parents are not available to them most of the time, if at all. Parents are leaving children behind to go in search of work; losing children in the context of Diaspora and armed conflicts; leaving children in the care of other children while trying to earn a living; dying of AIDS; being ravaged by drugs and poverty; or trying to carry on while juggling inhuman demands caused by long work days and the need to simply survive. Thus programmes need to identify who is actually caring for children and find ways to give those individuals support.

Local culture, tradition and norms
Culture and traditions will obviously impact on parental participation. For example, it may be that childcare is seen as a family concern, and that it is not appropriate to involve outsiders. In this case, to support the development of the youngest children programmes focus on working directly with family members. Equally, the experiences and norms of communities will help to determine – at least initially – the nature of participation. For example, in some instances there is a history of paternalism. This has created the expectation that goods and services will be provided at the whim of outside individuals and organisations. In these instances it is difficult to generate true participation as a project begins.

Nicaragua: parents lead their children from preschool to primary school
Pre-Escolares Comunales Project (Ministerio de Educación)
photo: Marc Mataheru

In contrast, there are examples of countries where there has been a strong sense of community responsibility within which programmes can be developed. Following independence in Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta, the first President, created the Harambee (pulling together) Movement within which people work together to solve their own problems rather than always being reliant on outsiders to provide for them.

A strong sense of community also exists in the Philippines, where, during the dictatorship of President Marcos, people learned to organise in opposition to his policies and programmes. As a result, there is now a rich tradition of People's Organisations where the impetus for action comes from the people in the community. Outsiders may be involved when the People's Organisations are seeking technical and/or monetary support, but it is the parents and the community members who initiate and drive the process.[6]

Programmatic

The 'stage' and nature of the project
During the lifetime of a project, the degree of parental participation may shift from one point on the continuum to another. For example, some programmes begin with the parents and the community taking the lead, but when the resulting programme is adopted by a government and 'institutionalised', the programme may have little parent input. This is frequently the result of 'scaling-up' and the need to create an easily disseminated system. In this instance the programme becomes a source of information rather than a generator of information. The opposite can also occur. There are programmes where the 'outsider' creates the initial project. But, over time and by design, the control of the programme may be shifted to parents.

Beliefs about the value of parental participation
The attitudes of those who are responsible for programmes can limit participation, consciously or unconsciously. Those creating programmes may make *a priori* judgements about the types and extent of parental participation that is appropriate. There may be limits on the domains that parents are permitted to operate in. For example, some believe that the ECD setting is the domain of the promoter/childminder while the parent's domain is the home. Thus control of centre-based programmes may remain in the hands of professionals. Even when parents are seen as important they may only be allowed to operate in certain programme areas. For instance, they may be restricted to cooking the food, and/or engaging in fundraising activities. Parent's views might only be sought to confirm decisions that have already been made. Parent's views might not be accepted if they happen to clash with those of people who think they know best. There may also be limits on the extent to which parents are allowed to 'own' the programme. Often projects

claim to promote parent participation but the actual ownership of the project remains with the 'outsiders'.

Access to resources

The extent to which parents can take determining or controlling roles in ECD programmes depends to some extent on the resources that they can access. The more resources they have available to them, the greater their potential to control the programme; the fewer parental resources, the more control is likely to remain with, or shift to, outsiders who provide needed resources.

Personal

The fact that parents are not a homogeneous group

Parents do not all think alike. Furthermore, needs or problems are seldom experienced collectively, even though there are common factors that help to determine what parents experience and need. Social class, religion and gender are also significant factors in determining the extent to which people are comfortable participating in community activities.

Not all parents may be offered the chance to contribute their views. Project developers frequently work with a group of parents (the designated leaders, usually men) assuming that they represent the views, needs and goals of the community as a whole. The actual beneficiaries (often women) may not have the power to make decisions as to how money is spent, for example. Some programme planners have developed specific strategies for addressing the marginalisation of women in programme decision making. Women in the Rehlahlilwe Project in South Africa describe their approach as follows:

> *Our entry point is not organisations but individuals ... usually individuals who are on the fringes of the community: women, peasant women, disempowered ... We have gone the route of structures [in the past] and as soon as men realise there is any money to be made, they move in and put themselves on as chairs of everything and as treasurers and everything else, and elbow the women out. So we have a policy of beginning with those very people who are elbowed out.*[7]

Parental knowledge/skills/experience base

Parents may lack knowledge in key areas. For example, parents may be very good at caring for their children in their own homes, but may have little idea about how to put together an appropriate curriculum for a centre-based programme. On the other hand, parents may have skills and experiences that enable them to provide services to a programme, and may indeed supply those services as they simultaneously acquire the knowledge the lack of which has so far kept them from fuller participation.

Daily life factors

Sometimes there is a tendency to blame parents for not taking a more active role in an ECD programme. However, the issue is not that parents don't want to support their children's development, but that all the many factors that put families at 'risk' to begin with, also limit what parents are able to do. These include:

- a woman's workday. A woman who needs to spend 16 plus hours a day working inside and/or outside the home has little spare time or energy available.
- Long distances to be travelled in order to receive services.
- Women's lack of autonomy in terms of making decisions.
- Poor communications. Parents may not be aware of the value of ECD programmes, and thus they do not get involved.
- The lack of transport and the need to carry young children to whatever services exist.
- Timing of the services may be out of sync with women's needs and availability.
- For some parents – especially those who have never had the opportunity to participate – lack of confidence, apprehension, even fear, may need to be overcome.
- Illiteracy may also be a factor.

Determinants of parental participation such as those considered above, have to be recognised and taken into account; and practical ways to overcome them have to be developed. As noted, these determinants can be explored by considering the relationship between parents and the organisation that sets out to create/implement an ECD programme. This relationship is not static; it changes over time and is framed to some extent by local conditions. Two key interacting variables can influence the ways in which relationships are initiated and developed and, therefore, the nature and extent of parental participation: the places in which projects are able to work with parents; and the processes created for engaging with parents.

Where people work with parents

Parent support in the home

One of the most intensive ways to work with families is through visits to the home by a trained home visitor. A home visit addresses the issue of care for the child within the child's natural context and underscores the importance of the caregivers' role in supporting the child's development. Furthermore, home visits are designed to help parents/caregivers to feel more at ease in expressing their views, and help break many mothers' feelings of isolation. Home visitors are frequently recruited from the local population that is being served by the programme. With appropriate support and training, they can provide very effective services that lead to both increased parental support of the child's development and the enhancement of the caregiver's self-concept. Home visitors also benefit considerably from being involved in the programme, gaining respect within the community and expanding their employment options.

Parents' groups

Parent groups generally bring parents together for a series of sessions. These are commonly organised as long courses (for example once a month over the course of a year), but they can also be short intensive interventions. Usually, those organising the course determine the topics, although some are defined by the parents themselves. Typical topics include: health, nutrition, child development, social development, and so on, and modules may consist of theoretical as well as practical applications. To help reinforce what is being learned, modules frequently include activities that parents can use with their children at home between sessions.

Within a parent group format, parents can be engaged in a discussion, even when the content is basically pre-determined. Facilitators can present materials for discussion, rather than presenting 'facts' and they can ask questions to which there are no necessarily right or wrong answers. Good facilitators can stimulate parents to ask their own questions, and encourage active exchanges among parents as a part of the process of introducing new material. For example, in a project with families from Afghanistan that have been affected by war and displacement, the facilitator presents pictures and asks questions that help parents to think about their children's experiences, and to focus on their responsibility to address their children's needs.[8] This replaces simply focusing on what the parents feel they need for themselves. Often one of the outcomes of these meetings is the formation of informal parent groups that continue to meet once the formal course is completed.

Through existing service delivery systems

Parenting messages can also be delivered through services that already exist – for example, health programmes. The World Health Organisation has a new initiative underway to introduce child development messages into its Integrated Management of Childhood Illness (IMCI) programme. More general community development programmes can also provide indirect support for parents by enhancing the environment as a whole, thereby positively benefiting families and children.

How people work with parents/caregivers

Regardless of where programmes choose to work with parents, choices are also made about how to work with them. These choices range from a deficit model that assumes parents know little or nothing about the topic, to an approach that supports parent's initiatives. Examples along the continuum include the following.

Telling/informing

Historically, outside professionals have made decisions about the nature of an ECD programme and its components. This 'top-down' or 'outside-in' approach has been especially common in the health field where some very basic health messages were (and are) assumed to be of such universal significance that they can be promoted without a great deal of consideration for the cultural context.

The approach of simply telling parents what to do is the least participatory methodology. In such programmes parents attend organised lectures where, using a didactic format, a specialist instructs them on providing for the young child's health, nutrition, cognitive, and/or psycho-social needs. There is little or no time for discussion and/or exchange among parents. The assumption is that parents lack the necessary knowledge about their children and need to be enlightened. This deficit model assumes that just telling parents what they need to know means they will do a better job with their children. Clearly this has not always worked and this has meant a shift to approaches in which, while the professionals are still in control, local adaptations are seen as appropriate. This may include additions to reflect the culture and/or taking examples from the setting.

An example of the shift from simply telling and informing to adaptations based on culture is the development of the treatment by parents of diarrhoea in their children. The vital message from 'outside' is that children need to continue to be fed and to be given liquids to restore and maintain their water levels. The initial approach to rehydration was to distribute Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT) packets that contained an appropriate mixture of sugar and salt that could be added to boiled water and fed to the child. This approach undoubtedly saved many lives, but was only moderately successful in many environments because of such factors as difficulties in distributing the packet; problems in understanding the instructions; inappropriate units of measurements; limited access to boiled water; and children's rejection of the awful tasting liquid. So new strategies were developed, building on what existed locally. The basic message was still the same – keep feeding children and do not let them become dehydrated. But the approach to hydration was different. It involved working with local people to identify locally available foods that children would eat that help alleviate dehydration.

Showing/modelling positive behaviour

This strategy involves having a trained teacher/facilitator demonstrate ways that parents can support children's learning. It is frequently used in home visiting programmes. The most common format is for the home visit to focus on the child's development and to discuss and then demonstrate the ways caregivers can promote that development, providing developmentally appropriate activities that parents can do with the child. The home visitor is generally perceived as the one with the knowledge and the parent as the receiver of the knowledge. This is particularly true where professionals are the home visitors and parents are shown how to do the 'correct' activity with the child. Needless to say, some parents can end up feeling that they do not know how to raise their children, and/or that there are 'special' things that they must do to give the child appropriate support. In home visiting programmes where the home visitors are peers of the parents, parents are on a more equal footing with the home visitor and the experience is generally more enabling for the parent being visited. (See the article about the Mothers Inform Mothers programme on page 18 for an example of a peer support home visiting programme.)

A related strategy is to identify parents from within the community who

represent 'positive deviance' (that is, they deviate from the norm, but their deviation has a positive impact on children). Since these parents are able to provide children with appropriate support, even in conditions of risk, the idea is to try and discover what it is that these parents are doing well and then spread these practices across the community. Here parents participate as models for their peers and, in some programmes, their knowledge base has been enhanced and their participation has been formalised so that they, in fact, act as tutors.

Building on people's strengths

Programmes that build on people's strengths shift some of the power and control from the service provider to the parent. The approach identifies, acknowledges and uses parental strengths as the basis for programming. The idea is that what parents do on a day-to-day basis with their children is valuable and should serve as the basis for building a programme. A project can begin with simply talking with parents about what they do with children. As Engle, Lhotska and Armstrong (1997)[9] note:

> Parents may not be aware of all of the different activities which they are already doing to support their children's development; they may think that they are just watching children grow.

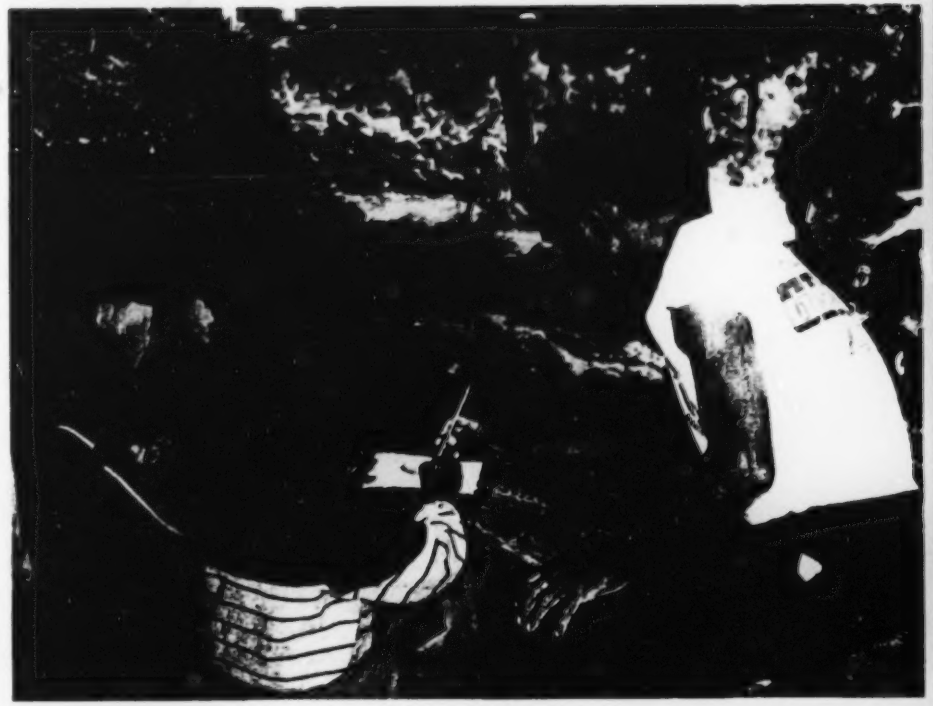
One way to create a programme is to begin by observing the kinds of activities that adults and children engage in throughout the day. Another step involves getting parents to talk about their children, what they are like and what they can do. From this, programme content can be developed that includes pictures of common activities and a simple explanation of what the child learns while undertaking a given task. For example, parents are told that an activity like cooking involves the development of estimating skills. But, even though the programme is based on things that parents do naturally with children, it is still outsiders telling parents what to do – in this case, 'Keep on doing what you are doing'. On the other hand, it emphasises that parents are children's first educators, and that they are participating in the programme – indeed they determine some of the content by turning everyday activities into developmentally significant opportunities. This approach also reinforces the fact that what mothers are already doing has enormous value for the child. It is a combination of being practical while also reinforcing what is currently taking place. This is summed up well by one of the Community Motivators in the Rehlahlilwe Project in South Africa,[10] in her discussion of what happened on visits to a rural area.

> *We then went back to a workshop and most of us expressed the same problem in various ways. We talked about it, that most of the people here in the rural areas have a lot of things to do during the day, and listening to us talking about children was considered a waste of time.*
>
> *We then shared better ways to reach these women and we went back, this time things were much better. One of the things we noted it was important to do was to join the work we find caregivers doing when we approach them and that worked well for us.*
>
> *We taught them that in all the household chores they are engaged in, a child can participate and learn. When you are doing your laundry a child can separate clothes in terms of colour and design.*

In summary, by beginning by observing daily life, programmes can work with parents so that they are aware of developmental stages and recognise the difference in children's development over time. They can identify learning situations at home through daily activities; recognise the human and material resources in the home environment; and can stimulate children while attending to daily work.

However, observation alone has limited value. Child rearing studies are a tool for going further in identifying positive parenting practices. Such studies can help programme planners to reach another – deeper – level of understanding. For

Philippines: *a father in his natural role*
Community of Learners Foundation Project
photo: Feny de los Angeles-Bautista/Lourdes I Aldaco



example, childrearing studies have proved to be a useful vehicle for trying to understand attitudes and beliefs, and for developing ways of working with parents that build on existing strengths. In essence, child rearing studies

> aim to combine a developmental psychology perspective with a cultural anthropological approach, valuing both.[11]

The key here is to ensure that the childrearing studies are done with the people whose practices and beliefs are being studied. Furthermore, conducting childrearing studies does not always guarantee that the content is truly grounded in local practice, attitudes and beliefs. Frequently, when the results of childrearing studies are turned into a curriculum and then used with the people studied, they end up asking the question *'What of us is in here?'* Something more is needed.

Engaging in partnership

The partnership approach to parental participation involves the joint determination of needs, and joint decision making about how those needs are to be met. The parents and the programme planners are equal partners, with the latter serving as catalysts and mobilisers. Arnold argues for programmes to be developed with parents through a dialogue that

> respects different views and allows different voices to be heard – valuing diversity and with an openness to creating new knowledge and new ideas.[12]

This open dialogue would result in a generative content – that is, one that is created out of genuine interaction with those for whom the content is to be created. Arnold explains the **generative** process as the

> pooling of knowledge bases, with both being regarded as valid, followed by dialogue in which new knowledge and ideas may be created, with all involved learning along the way.[13]

In engaging in partnership, however, at some point there is going to be a conflict between the practices and beliefs that are identified through childrearing studies, and those that are introduced by outsiders, who see some of the traditional beliefs and practices as harmful to the child's development. When that happens, decisions have to be made as to how this will be addressed. In general, what tends to happen is that the community yields to what has been brought in from outside. Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999) argue that this is the result of the power of 'modernity':

> The power of modernity… is such that the argument that its ways are 'best' can, and has, led some in the Majority World to accept the argument and the 'new ways'.[14]

To stay truly open to the process of creating partnership is extremely difficult. In addition, a genuine partnership is new in each setting, although it should be possible to create

Peru, Villa El Salvador: *workshop with parents drawing*
Proneei Project (Effectiveness Initiative)
Photo: SUMBI

a widely applicable process that will result in generating true partnerships. Nonetheless, few have enough patience to undertake the process, or the belief that it is really important and will yield appropriate results. Those of us who are outsiders continue to think that we have the answers to what people need. In summing up work with Native Americans, Dahlberg, Moss and Pence make the following comment that can be applied to the work of most of us involved in development:

One can only sit in stunned disbelief that intelligent and well-intentioned individuals can truly believe that they know more about what a community needs than the community itself. Such is the power of modernist belief that it can erase the evidence of history, the generations of well-meaningness that have reduced a population to death and despair, and still sincerely believe that this time it will be different, this time they will be proved right, this time it will work.[15]

Conclusions

ECD programme content comes from a variety of sources. But there is increasing recognition of the fact that what exists locally is often as good as (and sometimes better than) what might be introduced from outside. Even if this were not necessarily so, it is widely accepted that if you are going to change people's behaviour, you have to respect who they are and what they do before they are going to be open to learning something new from you. The value of many traditional practices and beliefs, and the need to respect those with whom we work, are increasingly at the foundation of parental participation within many ECD programmes today.

In summary, parents can be – and should be – valued partners. After all, they are their children's first teachers, and are the primary determinants of the environment within which their children are raised, particularly during children's earliest years. No programme can operate and survive without parental participation. Programme planners and policy makers need to recognise, value and respect what parents/caregivers have to offer. As they do that, they must also acknowledge that parent participation is not a constant or predictable construct. It varies depending on such factors as the nature of the parents, the opportunities and experiences they have had, the culture within which a project is being developed, the point in time within the project that parental participation is being defined, the attitudes and philosophies of all those involved, and a myriad of contextual variables.

Thus, in ECD programmes we should not impose one model of parental participation, nor should any degree or quality of parental participation be judged as inherently better than any other. But in programming – both on practical and philosophical grounds – we need to ensure that, whatever the local situations and circumstances, parental participation is an integral part of ECD programming as fully as is possible. ❍

Peru, Puno: *conversing with children, using a flannelgraph to help them express themselves*
Pronoei Project (Effectiveness Initiative)
Photo: SUMBI

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The Netherlands

Experienced mothers are the key

Yvonne de Graaf, Bert Prinsen, Mieke Vergeer

This article is about the keys roles that experienced mothers play in Moeders Informeren Moeders (MIM – Mothers Inform Mothers), a community-based early childhood care and development support programme. The project, operated by the Nederlands Instituut voor Zorg en Welzijn (NIZW), is based on the fact that experienced mothers from the same neighbourhood (peer group mothers) can readily support first time mothers and their babies. This idea has its roots in the Irish 'Community Mothers Programme' and the 'Child Development Programme' from the United Kingdom. Operating through the existing networks of local care organisations, MIM targets mothers from socially vulnerable environments who are not readily reached by regular healthcare services. The core of the project is a home visiting programme, centred on the development of babies and the well-being of the new mothers, and carried out by volunteer experienced mothers who are trained and supported by community nurses. Essentially, MIM has been developed as a part of the regular healthcare provision offered to new mothers. Slightly modified versions of the MIM approach are geared to specific target groups, such as rural populations, migrants, refugees and travelling people. Currently, there are MIM programmes in two large towns, six medium sized towns and three small towns in The Netherlands.

The Netherlands: *young mothers playing with their children.*
Moeders Informeren Moeders Project
Photo: NIZW – Nederlands Instituut voor Zorg en Welzijn

The Netherlands is a small, densely populated country. Approximately 15.2 million people live in the country and 3.7 million of these are under the age of 19. Preventive child health and welfare services for all children up to the age of 18 are a legal right, and are carried out by municipal or regional health authorities for school going children, and by community nursing agencies or general practitioners for babies and preschool children. Traditionally, healthcare professionals have had 'expert care provider' roles associated with the medical model. However, child healthcare has changed and community nurses are now embracing new concepts such as community-based models that include social and pedagogical support.

The aim of child healthcare services for preschool children in The Netherlands can be described as:

> the promotion and safeguarding of the healthy physical, mental and social development of the population of preschool children. This starts from the parents' personal responsibility, aiming to influence relevant health determinants, namely physical factors, health behaviour and relevant environmental factors, including the system of care itself.

One objective that can be made operational is

> to promote at an individual and group level, the personal competence and the responsibility of parents with regard to their children, if necessary by advancing their understanding of the health and (potential) development of their child and by increasing their competence.[1]

This includes stimulating behaviour that promotes good health.

The MIM programme tries to implement this objective, using an ecological model of development as characterised by Bronfenbrenner who recognised the importance of parents' roles in children's development, but equally recognised the importance of the environment in which families live:

> Whether parents can perform effectively in their childrearing roles within the family depends on role demands, stresses and support emanating from other settings. Parents' evaluation of their own capacity to function, as well as their view of their child, are related to such external factors as flexibility of job schedules, adequacy of childcare arrangements, the présence of neighbours and friends who can help out in large and small emergencies, the quality of health and social services and neighbourhood safety.[2]

What is MIM?

Against this background, the MIM programme has been developed as an innovative early childhood development and parent support programme that is based on a synthesis of nursing, pedagogical and health promotional theories. It forms part of the regular national child health and welfare service provisions, supporting inexperienced parents with parenting, helping them to cope and to stay abreast of their children's development, and helping to prevent childrearing problems. The programme aims to: enhance the ability of women to cope with their new born babies; enhance social support; encourage mothers to adapt their behaviour after receiving health educational information; increase the number of women breastfeeding; and make women feel in control of their lives. One key element is a focus on reinforcing mothers' sense of self-esteem, thereby improving their ability to parent without outside support.

The core of the project is a home visiting programme that centres on the development of babies and the well-being of the new mothers. We call them 'programme mothers'. The home visits are carried out by volunteer experienced mothers ('visiting mothers'). The visiting mothers are trained and supported by community nurses, and they address the same range of topics as in the Wellbaby Clinics run by the regular preventive child health and welfare services. However, within a home visit these topics are discussed from a pragmatic angle, in a context which is meaningful to the programme mother.

The programme mothers come from a multitude of countries in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America. Most have had ten years of formal education (intermediate and vocational level) and live on the earnings of their spouse. However, a few are double earners and a few live on social welfare payments. The programme starts early, ideally just before confinement. All first time mothers living in the participating areas are offered the programme but special attention is given to socially disadvantaged groups, members of immigrant communities and children in need.[3] Approximately 30 percent of all first time mothers participate in the programme, which is in line with the set target of the community nursing agencies.

The visiting mothers come from the target groups that they serve. They are well equipped to answer questions that expectant and new mothers may have, and MIM makes sure that they also have a close understanding of what the new

mothers are going through. For example, a visiting mother of twins is matched with a programme mother of twins. Programme mothers with a baby suffering from a severe allergy or a baby born prematurely, are matched in the same way to appropriate visiting mothers.

Preparation and reflection; sensitivity and respect

Community nurses, specialised in child healthcare and welfare, coordinate the programme in each area. They are responsible for recruiting both programme and visiting mothers to participate in the programme, and for matching them up according to educational or other significant common background variables. These variables include education, or specific experiences such as having premature babies. The community nurses prepare each visiting mother individually and, after two or three preparation sessions, she starts her home visits to her programme mothers. After each visit the visiting mother meets the community nurse for further support, based on her experiences during the visit.

Working with the community nurses, the visiting mothers plan for each visit using a discussion paper. They may use this during the visit, or to document their visit afterwards. The programme mothers will be given this document during the next visit and will thereby accumulate a complete record of all developments. The visiting mothers adapt MIM materials to suit the programme mothers they visit, using their own standards and experiences. Their approach is to give as little advice as possible. Rather, they support the young mothers in finding their own answers to day to day questions and in resolving problems when they arise.

As well as individual support from community nurses, visiting mothers benefit from group sessions every six or eight weeks. Some of these are run by the visiting mothers themselves, some by the community nurses. However, the main objective is always that the visiting mothers share and discuss experiences that are important for all of them, thereby learning through and from each other. An example of this reflective learning concerned a child who smacked another child. The assaulted child turned the other cheek (literally) and was struck again. Her mother was worried about this and did not know how to react so she asked her visiting mother for her views. In a group discussion, the visiting mothers discussed the topic because it might arise with any of their programme mothers and because it dealt with the difficult area of personal norms on violence.

Other topics in the group sessions have included special information that the mothers need to know about the MIM programme – such as how to use MIM tools – new activities for mothers with young children in the neighbourhood, and information about health and the local health service.

In practice, there are a maximum of 18 monthly home visits over an 18 month period and in each, the visiting mother uses two aids: a home visiting checklist of childcare related topics, which is used to introduce any topic the programme mother might be interested in; and a sequence of cartoons. The cartoons depict either different childcare related scenes, or the choices that can be made about a specific topic. The visiting mother develops a discussion with the programme mother about the contents of a cartoon and this is the starting point for an exploration of the programme mother's current attitudes, knowledge or behaviour. (see opposite page)

So far, so good

An action-research review of the MIM project shows how programme mothers of different social background benefited. For example, they showed increased self-confidence, felt more independent and were better able to make their own choices. Some stated that the programme caused them to treat their children differently than they had expected before starting with MIM. Paying systematic attention to the development of their babies made them more sensitive to incremental steps in their children's development. They also felt they had become more aware of the impact of their actions, and more active in positively rearing their children. Programme mothers also participated more in other activities organised for them and their

children, such as information meetings and playgroups.

Mothers mentioned several factors that motivated them to participate in the MIM programme. For example, some mothers liked to hear and read all about babies and childrearing and wanted to share their own experiences with others. Others reflected on their lack of social contacts in the neighbourhood: MIM gives them the opportunity to meet other mothers. Some mothers were confused by the volume of information that they had been given from many different sources. Before their participation in MIM, it had been difficult for them to make the choices that they felt were most appropriate to their own circumstances. The visiting mothers helped them to untangle the confusion.

Perhaps the most telling indication of MIM's impact can be gauged by hearing about the experiences of some of the mothers themselves. Joanka Prakken has assembled some of these in *Ik dacht in het begin dat ik geen goede moeder was (In the beginning, I thought that I was not a good mother)*. Here are her examples of programme mothers from the city of Breda.

Claudia became a first time mother some nine months ago – in fact she had twins. And, as Claudia will emphatically tell you, a first baby raises many questions, doubts and uncertainties. Claudia talks fast, stumbling over her own words as she tells you her story:

> *Twins! You don't know what's happening to you! It started when they both were on a different feeding regime – it took me all day to feed them and I never had a moment to myself!*
>
> *And then there was the crying: some sixteen hours a day – from stomach cramps as they found out later.*

Claudia had the feeling that she didn't perform well as a mother. And everyone who was supposed to assist her had different opinions and gave her different advice:

> *I could really have flown into a rage against those know-it-alls: "Just let the babies cry" they told me, "it's their crying hour". But they only had one*

Using the cartoons

The cartoons contain seven different themes about childrearing and child development: social-emotional development of the child and social-emotional support of the mother; physical development; play; feeding; cognitive development; language and safety. These are areas in which the mothers themselves have influence.

During the home visit the programme mother talks about her experience with the baby and the questions she has or problems she has met. Together with the visiting mother she looks for cartoons that match her questions or interests. For example, as a result of discussions about breastfeeding based on one cartoon, a mother from Sri Lanka discovered that she could request the use of a room and free time for breastfeeding her child during her Dutch language lessons.

The cartoons also help mothers to cope with the unexpected. For example, most babies develop special bonds with the people who care for them and are most often with them. But, at the age of about nine months, they may get angry or upset when they see a stranger. A new mother may not expect this and believe that her child is acting abnormally. She can discuss this with her visiting mother while the cartoon shows her that her child's behaviour is normal.

The Netherlands: *cartoons to open up discussions*
Moeders Informeren Moeders Project

The Netherlands: *the MIM Coordinators' Handbook*
Moeders Informeren Moeders Project

child each who maybe cried for just an hour. I had twins who were only quiet when I was feeding them. How could they imagine themselves in my situation?

But then Claudia heard about the Moeders Informeren Moeders (MIM) programme. Through mim Claudia came into contact with Milia, a mother of three year old twins. Milia, unlike Claudia, keeps calm, and has been able to give Claudia more self-confidence:

If you become a first time mother, you're insecure. You face the same problems over and over again and wonder whether you are doing well. A baby is not always so great. It's not easy to say this, certainly not against your own surroundings.

A mother can tell me her story. I don't come to Claudia to tell her how she should do it. I see myself as a sort of colleague mother who can depend on her experience as a mother. We talk and I try to really understand what she thinks is important, what she wants for her children or what bothers her. I let her come up with solutions herself. Every child is different, so what worked with my children, might fail with her's. Often she already knows what is good for her babies: all she needs is for me to confirm it

Renate is another mother from Breda, who participated in MIM. She lives in a district of the city in which there are many young families with small children. Newcomers are from various social backgrounds and there is little contact between them. Renate believes that mim can help mothers to make contacts between themselves. Her family lives far away and her friends who live in the neighbourhood have no children.

Some programme mothers have progressed to become visiting mothers, among them is Carolina Kleinjan:

My motivation comes from my past experience: I benefited from the programme and wanted to give something in return. My first contact with MIM was when my first child was born and I was asked to enter

the programme as a programme mother. At the time, the programme had just started in The Netherlands and was still developing. After nine months my visiting mum stopped working in the programme for personal reasons but, in our last conversation, she suggested to me that I should become a visiting mother myself. At first I did not think I had enough experience.

Then, after giving birth to my second child, the MIM *co-ordinator in Breda, Annette phoned and asked me if I would like to participate? I said yes – I wanted to help mothers in the same way that my visiting mother had helped me. As a visiting mother I try to support other mothers in making their own decisions. Helping them to trust their own intuition and showing them how their child is developing are some of the other things we try to do.*

Others added their own reasons for becoming visiting mothers. These included: to help other first time mothers to enjoy their babies; to give support and make programme mothers trust their own intuition; to help young mothers make social contacts; and to give programme mothers the important experience of having someone listen to them.

In terms of the impact on them as people, visiting mothers show increased self-sufficiency and enhanced self-esteem. They participate more in social activities within and outside the programme, some have moved into further education, and others have either already moved into paid employment or expect to do so.[4]

Conclusions

After several years of developing, operating and reflecting on the MIM project, several lessons have emerged. The most important are:

- the fact that the programme is home-based increases the confidence of the programme mothers;
- developing the programme in partnership with the target group ensures that the programme is well suited to the target group;
- working through visiting mothers from the programme mothers' peer group solves many of the problems of reaching those living in disadvantaged/multiple problem circumstances;
- the MIM approach produces self-reliant and self-confident mothers;
- it also clearly enhances the personal development of the visiting mothers;
- from a professional perspective, the programme has been instrumental in enhancing our quality assurance activities; and
- a clear understanding of the range and type of questions that programme mothers ask the visiting mothers has had a direct influence on practices at Wellbaby Clinics. For example, both nurses and doctors now pay more attention to the needs and questions of the parents; and they adapt advice to fit the specific situation of the family and the development of each child.

In general, we believe that MIM – like other community-based programmes – helps to stimulate and enable new mothers as they support the health promoting and child development behaviour. It does this by empowering parents and supporting them both personally and as the people who are most important in their developing children's lives.

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Canada

Parents and children together – the development of the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Programme

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Aboriginal Head Start (AHS) is a national early intervention programme funded by Health Canada, for First Nations, Inuit and Métis preschool children and their families. Approximately 3,500 children participate annually in 98 aboriginal Head Start centres located across Canada. The Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Programme started in 1996. It is modelled after the Head Start Programme in the United States[1] that is designed to give preschool children and their parents an opportunity for educational and spiritual development. The programme operates in a centre in the heart of the City of Winnipeg. Recent statistics identify this part of the city as the poorest urban constituency in Canada.[2] It is a neighbourhood of extreme need for children and families, and high risk too: health, safety, housing, employment, education, personal relationships – all need attention. Single parents and/or grandparents often head families.

But beyond the graffiti-painted fences, inside an old brick building, there is a large room, painted with lively earth colours: the playroom for the children. The four directions, represented with four colours, invite people to understand Ojibway and Cree cultures. On one wall is the kitchen niche, open to the playroom so cooks can be part of the children's programme. One wall has windows with a view to a small playground and park. Another wall has windows that look into the offices of staff. Parent participation is a key to the success of the programme, which honours and supports traditional cultural and spiritual values.

Canada, *playing happily in a safe environment*
Photo: the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Programme

Most of the participants of the programme are aboriginal, mainly Ojibway or Cree. Like other Canadian aboriginals, the participants have endured a history of oppression. Over 200 years of colonisation by a powerful Euro-Canadian government has had a deleterious effect on generations of aboriginals.[3,4,5] One particular policy that had an effect on education and parenting was the forced removal of aboriginal children to residential schools under the British North American Indian Act of 1876 that stipulated isolation, education and assimilation.[6,7]

Residential schools began in the mid 19th century and continued through the 1960s.[8] In these schools, many aboriginal children suffered physical and emotional abuses and a disregard for their cultural identities. Children were not allowed to speak their native languages and besides the brief summer holidays, they were not allowed to contact their families and communities.[9] Participants in our programme remember their educational experiences as being humiliating and painful, affecting not only their own lives but also those of their children and grandchildren.

> *We were beaten. Probably for no reason. Well, we were children so what reason could there have been? They hated us.*

> *I don't remember anything about that school. I don't believe they taught us anything.*

And they continue to feel the effects on their ability to parent, and to accept their cultural identity and pass it to their children.

> *My first language was Ojibway. I always struggled in school. At home that's all we spoke when we were younger. This one teacher said I would never amount to anything because of my language.*

> *I've always been self-conscious and when I had my kids, I told them I wasn't going to teach them our language because of the fact that I had struggled ... like there was so much taken away from us we didn't even want to be who we were. Well, it was the teachers; it wasn't the kids. [The agency that] used to run the schools always labelled us the dumb ones.*[10]

By the time the Canadian government ended this policy, many aboriginal people had become separated from their traditional parenting and childcare values and practices.[11,12] They had not experienced positive parenting nor had they been permitted to observe their parents or other family members engaging in healthy parenting.[13]

These former policies have a direct impact on the current generation of parents in the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Programme. In addition, these parents have been subjected to poverty, oppression, and attacks on their culture and language. Many have been addicted to alcohol and drugs; and the local Child and Family Services Department removed many children from their families of origin, sending them to foster families outside their own cultures. For mothers, losing children is intensely painful:

> *I felt like I wanted to give up everything. I started thinking stupid, and I was mad. Then, I started to want to find out about my identity. Well, I think for me it's too late, so I want to concentrate on the kids, making sure they know.*

A symbiotic response

Against this background, we felt that the only possible approach was to acknowledge such realities and respond to them by working alongside parents and caregivers. Rather than simply being needs based, we wanted to ensure that the centre, and the nature and content of the programme, developed as the parents and children themselves developed. As a broad aim, we were committed to fostering the spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical growth of young, aboriginal

children living in the community. And, as a basic strategy, we recognised and supported extended families. At the same time, we were also committed to real partnership, a partnership between staff and parents, and to the policy of Aboriginal control of Aboriginal health and education. To achieve this, we have focused on sustaining healthy personal growth and development in parents, and on helping parents to generate success for themselves.

Twenty seven families are enrolled at the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Programme. Forty children attend the early childhood education programme, starting at age three and remaining until they enter grade one public school, usually at six. The programme focuses on the whole family. Parents are told at registration that their collaboration, including volunteer time, is expected. When we began in 1996, staff had difficulty in getting parents to volunteer for six hours per week, but by 1999, 27 parents were volunteering for an average of almost 10 hours per week.

In terms of content of the programme, children learn about their culture, traditions and language, while parents learn parenting skills. There is also a focus on smoothing children's entry into formal primary school. Pride in aboriginal culture and language is emphasised. To counteract the effects of residential schools, the programme helps parents to accept their cultural identity and pass it on to their children.

The programme for children offers ample opportunity for parents/caregivers to participate and thereby develop personally. It includes arts and crafts, theatre and storytelling, free play, socialisation and relaxation. Children learn Ojibway and Cree culture, traditions and language. They learn to respect the environment and to cooperate with others. They also participate in music and dance: singing and drumming are Ojibway and Cree cultural activities and the children enjoy these. By participating alongside their children, parents learn themselves and also support the learning of their children:

The greatest effect Head Start has had on my life is that the programme has brought me closer to my children. I have always loved my children, but things keep getting better. In the past, I listened to what my children had to say; now I hear them.

Before I became involved with the Head Start Programme I had little interaction with my children. Since I started getting involved in the programme I spend tons of time with my children, copying activities I learned from staff at the programme. I have more confidence when I interact with my children and confidence to try new things. I believe my ability to understand and communicate with my children has improved.

Being involved with Head Start gave my daughter a positive start before she started school. Her kindergarten teacher told me that my daughter was ahead of most children with letter and number recognition and saying words. I'm very proud of her.

At the same time, a variety of educational and support activities and services have enabled the Oshki-majahitowiin staff to facilitate the healthy development of parents,[14] and to help them generate success. For example, each week a sharing circle is held in which parents and grandparents interact with a certified play therapist to work through personal issues and childcare concerns:

> *Several years ago my children were removed from my care by the Child and Family Services. This experience was a wake up call for me. I took the opportunity to better myself in order to better care for my children. I see the Head Start Programme as a big part of my plan to heal from my past and to give my children a stable environment.*

The children have been returned to this woman's care, and she recently received an award for exceptional volunteer assistance in the programme. Other women view her as an inspiration, a role model and a support in their own paths to healing (see next page).

One role that has developed for parents is creating traditional arts and crafts and they meet three times a week to learn and share their skills:

> *The most satisfying experience for me happened at a session where some women were discussing things that the children needed. One woman suggested that the children needed moccasins. I spoke up and told the other women that I knew how to make moccasins. Later, I was given the opportunity to do a workshop making moccasins.*

Parents have also found roles in the programme's community kitchen, cooking meals for children and assisting in meal planning and budgeting. They also cook collectively for their families. Working in the kitchen allows them to form a network with others and has direct personal benefits:

> *I am no longer depressed because I'm always busy.*

Another significant area of parent participation is fundraising. In 1997/98 parents raised over CAN$2,000 by selling crafts, requesting donations, selling old

A mother's story

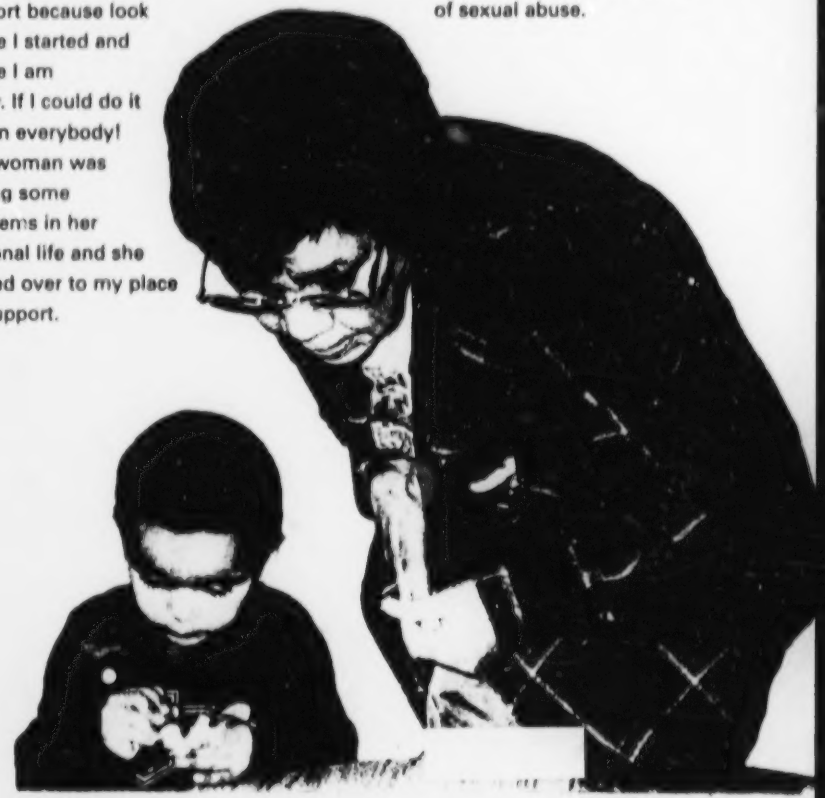
I am thirty six years old and I am a single parent raising five children. I was born in a small town, west of the city of Winnipeg. I was raised on a Indian Reserve by my auntie on my dad's side. When I was seven I went to live with my mom. In my childhood I was beaten up, everybody was an alcoholic and I was sexually abused. I left home when I was seventeen. My five children have four different dads. My relationship with each one of the men involved violence and alcohol abuse. I used alcohol and drugs just so I could cope. My children were taken away from me by the child protection [agency] because of my drinking and drugs. They were returned to me but then taken away again because of the same reason. The second time they were taken away was a real eye opener. This became the starting point of an ongoing healing process. My children were returned to me and have been in my care ever since.

I began the Head Start Programme about two years ago after hearing about the programme from a friend. I believed the programme would help me and my children learn and get improved social skills. I believe the programme helped me in many ways. The workshops helped me learn a lot about parenting and how to have a better relationship with my kids. I feel comfortable now getting crazy and silly with the kids. Before I started to come to the programme I shut the door on my own kids. Now I realised I could be a good parent.

What did I contribute to the programme? I help with the crafts programme. The others tell me I am a role model and a support because look where I started and where I am today. If I could do it so can everybody! One woman was having some problems in her personal life and she walked over to my place for support. I better understand my own life and my difficulties and I share my experiences and help other women.

Last September, because of all my participation with the programme, I was chosen to attend the National Head Start Conference in Saskatoon. It was my first trip!

I now raise my kids in an alcohol free environment. I would also like to work with women, especially survivors of sexual abuse.



goods, conducting raffles and sales of baked products. All of the money was put towards holiday dinners and celebrations such as the children's graduation ceremony.

Perhaps the most striking demonstration of reaching our objectives is that parents now have roles on boards and committees. Here, parents assume the responsibility and control of the programme's curriculum, philosophy and objectives. Board and committee membership means that parents liaise with other members of the community, community leaders and professionals in health, education and social services. Board and committee members discuss education possibilities for themselves and their children, the transition between home, Head Start and school, and community development and employment options. One woman still can't believe how far she had come in her influence in her community:

> *I never thought I'd ever see myself here, doing these things, being on a board of directors. I never even knew what it was. I thought 'What do those guys do? Sit on a board?' Now I know I have a voice and people listen. I can say my opinion about so many things. And I listen to what other people say and think. I never just make a decision. I always listen to what everyone is saying and then we discuss these things as a board together. And it's really incredible. I still can't believe it, where I was three years ago and where I am now!*

Conclusions

Looking at the benefits of parental participation, we feel the programme has an impact on families and on individuals. Parents feel they have more control, can make a better life for their children, and can make a difference based on what they choose to do. The impact also appears in the statistics. High residential mobility is characteristic for Winnipeg's inner city – some public schools report a 100 percent or greater turnover rate over three years.[15] Yet several parents have told us that they have postponed moving in order that their children could continue to participate in the Oshki-majahitowiin Head Start Programme. Nineteen families have been with the programme since it opened in 1996. (Of the families who have left the programme, four had children who graduated and all the others moved to new locations.)

The centre essentially belongs to the parents and children. It is alert to their needs while drawing on their cultures, traditions, ideas and skills, and mobilising and building on their individual resources. Successes are shared, and participants are committed to learning about themselves, their children, their language and cultural identity. Staff notice the parents' sense of loyalty and commitment, the development of a social network based on the centre, the ways in which participants are able to reach into the community, and the feelings of mutual respect.

Parents believe in their own power and in the effect they have on their children's development and progress. Rather than giving up or blaming others for their failures they have taken back control:

> *A lot has been done to my people. A lot of bad things have happened to my family. And I want these things to stop. I have an influence on my children. Sometimes I'm dying to have a drink, so much I even dream about it at night ... but I can't because I know the damage it will do. I know what happened to my older children and I know what happened to me because my mother drank. She hurt me and I hurt them. I feel now that I have control in my life and I want to keep it there. I feel like I can make a better life for my children. I can make that difference based on what I choose to do.*

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A grandmother's story

I am 52 years old and I am raising triplet grandchildren, three boys. They have been with me for one year and a half. I was raised in a tiny community North of the city of Winnipeg. Cree is my first language. I am one of three [siblings] raised by our parents. When I was two years old I went into a coma which lasted for three days. To this day people from my community believe that I had died and came back.

I left home when I was 16 and moved to Winnipeg. I started to get involved in a relationship with a man. I stayed with him for over thirty years until he died last year. We had four children together. None of them were ever involved with the criminal or child protection systems.

I always had a big part in my grandchildren's lives but a year and a half ago their birth mother asked me to raise them full time. Although it's been ten years since I raised my last child I agreed right away.

I heard about the Head Start Programme from [another community resource]. At first I enrolled just one grandchild; I wasn't sure what to expect from the programme. As soon as I realised how nice and friendly everybody at the programme was, I enrolled the other boys and started participating a lot myself.

The Head Start Programme is a second home to me. The people are friendly and very easy to talk with. I learned a lot by participating in workshops about children and how they develop and learn and I learned about my grandsons. Being a traditional Indian woman, the cultural and language part of the programme is also very important to me. One time, after my partner died the staff brought over a basket full of food for the boys and me with all kinds of food, especially traditional food.

My contributions to the programme? I don't know (laughs nervously). I can share my experiences with the others and I am a good listener and I really understand a lot of what the younger moms are going through. I feel like this is my community, so I understand.

I am very worried now because the birth mother is causing a lot of problems for us. She has started to interfere with the stability of the boys. I was hoping I could continue to raise them in a loving and safe environment. So this is a problem but Head Start staff and everyone here has been very helpful in every way. They really care and anytime I need them they are there.

Also, about two months ago I was hired to be the cook at Head Start. I work five days a week from 9 am to 12 mid-day preparing breakfast and lunch for the children. Before this job I had to live off the pension. First thing I did after getting my first pay check I took the boys to McDonald's for supper!

Kenya

In the enclosure

Joanna Bouma

The author is editor of the Foundation's 'Practice and Reflection in ECD' and 'Working Papers in ECD' series. In this article she reflects on the roles of parents in programmes for young children, as she observed them during a recent working visit to the Foundation-supported Samburu ECD Project in Northern Kenya earlier this year. All the project's work is based in communities, and is run by community committees, focus groups and so on, thereby having the greatest impact on the families and communities. Among the programmes that it runs are those that focus on health, nutrition, food security, education, water provision, and peace initiatives.

The project's focus on early childhood development (ECD) is relatively new but it now supports a number of ECD programmes. This article describes a 'typical' ECD programme – actually an amalgamation of different programmes scattered across a very harsh and isolated part of the country. What the author saw was impressive: parents as initiators, controllers and operators of their children's ECD programmes; the project as an enabler and facilitator responding to parents' needs.

Kenya Leirr ECD activity centre: *monitoring growth*
Samburu ECD Project
Photo: Joanna Bouma

The sound of children singing comes through the warm, dry air. As one of the social workers from the Foundation's project partner – who acted as interpreter between English and Samburu and Turkana – and I approached the ECD activities centre, we could begin to hear the sound of stamping feet and voices. Coming over a slight hill, a brush fence came into view, topped by the smiling faces of a couple of mothers who had spotted us approaching and were now pushing aside some of the brush that is used as a gate to let us in. Inside were dozens of small curious children, many of whom kept on playing, unbothered by our arrival. You could feel the very positive atmosphere straight away. It was informal, welcoming and friendly, and it seemed that everybody there – both children and adults – knew exactly what they were doing, and that what they were doing was something important.

We had arrived in a typical early childhood development (ECD) programme supported by the community-based Samburu ECD Project, from it's two offices (El Barta and Nyuat) that are based in Baragoi and Maralal, in the Samburu District of Northern Kenya. This project is a joint effort between the Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) NACECE/DICECE, and the Christian Children's Fund (CCF).

Working in a harsh environment

The Samburu ECD Project works in the Samburu District in the Northern part of Kenya, an area classified as arid and semi-arid. The scrubland and the limited rainfall mean that the most viable way of life for the resident Samburu and Turkana peoples is nomadic pastoralism. The people move with their livestock – mainly cattle, sheep, goats, and camels – to find water and pasture.

This traditional way of life has become more precarious recently as the rains, sporadic at the best of times, have consistently failed. Malnutrition is becoming more and more commonplace, leaving the people – and especially the children – increasingly vulnerable. Livestock, which is the livelihood of the people, is dwindling as the dry earth alone cannot support sufficient vegetation for their feed. The resulting poverty has caused increased cattle rustling in the area – called 'insecurity' in the local terminology – and this has been a real problem in the last few years.

In turn, insecurity has pushed large numbers of formerly nomadic families to take up a semi-permanent residence around the major trading centres where there is a greater degree of safety. This in its turn is putting an even higher strain on the water and vegetation sources of the area, and is causing rapid changes in the societal structure.

Health hazards such as dysentery and diarrhoea have become prevalent because of overcrowding. It is common for women to spend almost a whole day walking great distances to fetch small amounts of water from dwindling sources, and for men to roam great distances with the livestock in search of food and water. And what happens to their children while they are away? They are often left alone or in the care of a sibling.

The Samburu ECD Project: a parents' project

In this harsh environment, the Samburu ECD Project is working towards the empowerment of the Samburu and Turkana communities through its integrated project work. Part of its approach is to work with parents to give their children care and stimulation, and the chance to have more choice in the future. The ECD work was initiated in 1997 through the collaborative efforts of KIE and CCF. By carrying out participatory research on the traditional childcare practices of the Samburu and Turkana, the project and the community determined the need to address the situation of young children, then the parents took the lead. While they had traditional ways of childrearing and organising childcare, they did not have the expertise to organise themselves on a wider scale – and especially not in the context of the breaking down of traditional community structures. Nor did they have the financial resources required to purchase basic materials or the food supplements that they saw their children needed. So they applied to

the project for help in this area, and this was quickly provided.

What they did have though, was real commitment to making the programmes work. In many ECD programmes 'parental participation' all too often means merely cleaning up after the children have left, repairing toys, doing some manual work, cooking the food and so on. In the Samburu ECD Project, parental participation means that the parents are in charge from the conceptual stage right through to running the programmes, and only approach the project for minimal support. All parents ask for is some initial support in terms of small funding; some help in learning how to organise themselves and run a programme; some knowledge on nutrition for young children; and some basic training in working with young children.

The Lmwate – traditional childcare

All the ECD settings are based on the traditional Lmwate system. Lmwate – plural Lmwaat – loosely translated means 'an enclosure'. In some Samburu areas they are called 'Loip' – plural Loipi – meaning 'shade' while the Turkana community call them 'Ekwoel la Poloin' meaning 'big house'. Traditionally, parents used to construct Lmwaat where there was shade from a tree or house and leave their children in the care of grandmothers while they were working. The gate to each enclosure was strategically sited in the shade, making it easy for the even very old grandmothers to look after the children. They would play with the children and teach them songs, poems and stories.

They would make toys, play equipment, and musical instruments. In short, all aspects of child development were addressed in the Lmwate. The children received mental stimulation from the songs, poems, and stories. And, because these often had a moral edge to them, the children would also learn right from wrong and how to function in society. The latter would be reinforced by the socialisation aspect of the Lmwate: the simple fact that there would be other children and adults in the Lmwate with whom to play and talk, and with whom they would have to learn to share and get along. The grandmothers were the

Kenya Huruma ECD activity centre: *playing safely*
Samburu ECD Project
Photo: Joanna Bouma

ones who knew about traditional medicines and healing practices, and this was also useful when working with the children.

While grandmothers don't take care of children in return for payment, parents still have an obligation to give them food and water, help build houses for them, or provide whatever assistance the grandmothers need.

This system of childcare has worked for countless generations. In more recent times, however, the gradual modernisation of the Samburu and Turkana societies has been having an impact on traditional family structures and the way communities are organised. Over the past few years, 'insecurity' has hastened this process with the result that many children neither benefit from traditional forms of childcare nor from more modern ones. As already discussed, with the men in the family going longer distances to find food and water for the livestock, and the women going longer distances in search of water for the family, many young children are left alone at home or left in the care of siblings not much older than themselves. Given these factors, many communities started to realise that they had to bring back the traditional early childhood development practices, of which Lmwaat are practical examples.

Setting up a modern Lmwate

At the activity site, the mothers and fathers who had set it up, told me their story. They all came from the neighbouring area, all living within about a 15 minute walk from the Lmwate. About one and a half years ago, they had realised that their youngest children were not receiving any form of care, and were often either left alone while other family members went about their domestic tasks or else were taken along and had to endure very long days and walk very long distances. The parents felt that this was detrimental both for their children and for they themselves, and that they had to do something about it.

During their regular community meetings, they thought about the options available and related this to how childcare was organised in the past. Memories of the Lmwate run by the grandmothers was still clear and dear in many people's minds, and they realised that they could revive this traditional form of childcare. On this basis, they formed an ECD Centre Committee made up of volunteer parents from within their own community. The Committee was to be responsible for creating a modern Lmwate. In consultation with the community members, the Committee chose a location with a number of trees for shade near the community and came up with a rough design for the centre. They then mobilised parents and other community members to clear the land of brush and thorns and animals, and built a perimeter fence using the brush that they had cleared. They also constructed a big house for the children to rest in and take refuge in when it rains. They now had their basic Lmwate.

Talking to the elderly grandmothers who had either been 'carer grandmothers' or else had been under the care of carer grandmothers within the community, the Committee

Kenya: *teaching aid about childcare, painted on project office wall*
Samburu ECD Project

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Kenya: ***learning aid about reaching pastoralists, painted on project office wall***
Samburu ECD Project

developed ideas about the kinds of activities that were possible and desirable. Based on the advice from the elderly, they made a number of toys, collected a number of songs, stories, riddles and poems, and designed and built play equipment. The toys included wooden and leather dolls and balls, clay and rattan animals, slings, rattles, catapults. The play equipment included climbing frames, raised platforms, miniature houses, swings, see-saws, hoops, crawling tunnels and so on. The parents told me that the interest generated among community members was high, and that many people offered their labour so that the site was quickly built and equipped.

While this work kept most of the parents busy, the Committee, again in consultation with the community, selected a few of the parents to work in turn at the site. The Committee approached the Samburu ECD Project, and the project provided basic training in ECD for the parents. In their turn, the trained parents now share their knowledge with the other mothers who work in the site. In this way, everyone's capacity is gradually built up. Among the original mothers who received training were a couple who were appointed as 'supervisor mothers'. They received some extra training and are always at the centre to oversee the activities that take place.

Apart from training on ECD activities, the project also provided training on health, nutrition and hygiene. It also helped the Committee with obtaining basic medicines and supplementary porridge for the children's midday meal, including enriched porridge for those who suffer from malnutrition. Once all these elements were in place the project stepped back. Its involvement is now confined to being available when the Committee itself approaches it, although the Committee does keep the project up to date with how everything is going. The project's community mobilisers make regular visits to the centre and to homes to keep in touch with families in particular need; and its health worker also regularly provides health messages, guides the monitoring of the growth of children and monitors malnutrition. In all other aspects the centres are self-sustaining, independent bodies.

Keeping the site going

The programme is open every morning and can only be sustained by the input of parents. All the mothers take turns to work in the programme and they have set up a rota for this. However, because the setting is so friendly and homely, most mothers in fact appear to turn up almost every day if they can fit it into their daily chores. Each site also has a cook who makes the midday porridge for the children. She also adds enriched supplements to the porridge of the children suffering from malnutrition. Many of the children who come to the programme for the first time suffer from malnutrition and they are easy to spot among the rest: they are apathetic, don't socialise, nor do they play. Within a few months however, through the food supplements and gradual socialisation, many overcome their difficult situations, become more playful and mix with the other children.

Each family contributes whatever they can to the centre in kind. This may be some water – a very precious

commodity – some food, or perhaps utensils such as spoons or cups made from old containers. Families may collect certain types of twigs which are used for cleaning teeth, bark strips to make toys, or branches for making climbing frames. And, of course, the parents contribute their time and labour to maintain the programme, make new toys and equipment, and repair the equipment. Time and labour are significant contributions because they take precious time and energy away from searching for food and water.

The end result is an ECD programme that functions well, that is welcoming to all, and which has become more than simply an ECD programme: it is a central part of the community. The centre welcomes everybody, so that there is continuous traffic of adults and children coming in or going out. In fact, it is used by all in the community to such an extent that the supervisor mothers in this programme have complained about the older children coming after school to play. In itself this is not a problem, but because they're so much bigger and heavier than the young children, they sometimes break the play equipment. This causes great inconvenience to the parents and the young children, so the Committee is thinking about running a programme for the teenagers in the afternoon. This would benefit both the teenagers and protect the equipment.

What are the benefits for the parents and children?

Talking to the parents, it was good to see how clear they were about the benefits of the programme for the whole community, and how determined they were to keep the programme going. They discussed several different benefits. The more obvious ones were that the children are healthier because they are guaranteed a meal – which does not always happen if they are at home – and therefore have put on weight, are growing better and have more energy. They are also cleaner, because the parents have learnt the importance of hygiene and how to keep the children as clean as possible with very limited water. This in turn has reduced the incidence of problems such as scabies, jiggers, and skin rashes. The children's behaviour has also changed because of mixing with other children and adults: they are no longer afraid of strangers and are more independent. A couple of people also put this down to the fact that the children are now more exposed to outside influences during their walk from home to the centre, which widens their view of the world.

Some of the mothers mentioned that their children were more helpful at home and in the community. They thought that the reason was that the children saw that they lived with other people, and they saw that they sometimes had to wait their turn. Children also imitated the carer parents as they went round cleaning the site or organising the children. The parents reported that their children were physically able to do things which other

Kenya: *learning aid about a good harvest, painted on project office wa*
Samburu ECD Project

Kenya: ***learning aid about a healthy diet from the family farm, painted on project office wall***
Samburu ECD Project

children were not able to do, and were less clumsy than before. They put this down to playing on the climbing frames and see-saws and crawling through the tunnels, thereby building up muscles and coordination.

Many of the parents – the fathers in particular – appreciated the fact that traditions were being revived. They enjoyed hearing the children singing old songs, reciting poems and stories, and asking them riddles. This aspect seems to play a significant part in bringing fathers and grandfathers into the ECD programmes.

I also had the opportunity to talk to some preschool teachers in the area, whose preschools receive children from the ECD programme. The preschool teachers all said that there is a big difference between the children who come from the ECD programme and those that come straight from home. In fact, since the ECD programme was set up their jobs have been made much easier. They no longer have to expend time and energy trying to get children to feel comfortable in a new setting and with other children. The programme children happily mix with the others, putting them at their ease. They are also interested in learning, understand things quicker, listen better, take the initiative more and are easier to organise. The only problem that the preschool teachers occasionally face is that some of the children want to go back to the ECD site because they can play more there.

A lasting impression

My experience in the Samburu ECD Project was rewarding in so many ways, and there is much that I will carry with me for a long time to come. One of the visual images that sticks in my mind, is the picture of those mothers opening the brush gate for us, smiling and welcoming us with great pride into their world of children. This simple picture reveals many deeper meanings. It reveals the commitment that the parents in the area have towards their children's well-being and development; and their will to give their children the best through the ECD programme. It reveals the great efforts that the parents put into their own empowerment; and their firm belief in their own capacity. But the image also reveals the fundamental belief of the Samburu ECD Project in parental participation and its commitment to that belief. This will be my lasting impression; and it's a hugely powerful one.

Nicaragua

The centrality of parents

Where can and do parents fit into the programmes that support the development of their children? Parents themselves have clear views, as is shown by these extracts from a discussion with members of the Comite de Padres de Familia (the Parents' Committee) of the Los Cumiches Centre in a marginalised area of Managua, the capital of Nicaragua.

The centre has been developed with CANTERA, an NGO that has been working since 1989 on a community-based, integrated childcare and education programme in Cuidad Sandino, Managua. The aim has been to develop and support preschools across five areas. Included in this work is supporting the formation of Parents' Committees and helping them to acquire the skills, information and experience that they need to complement the work of the educators.

The members of the Los Cumiches Parents' Committee began by talking about their general roles and motivations, then recalled how nervous they felt about taking on important roles in the operation of the centre.

Our job is to collaborate with the principal of the centre and with the educators. If we decide that something should be done, we organise it ourselves. We do it with the preschool and the coordinator from CANTERA supports us.

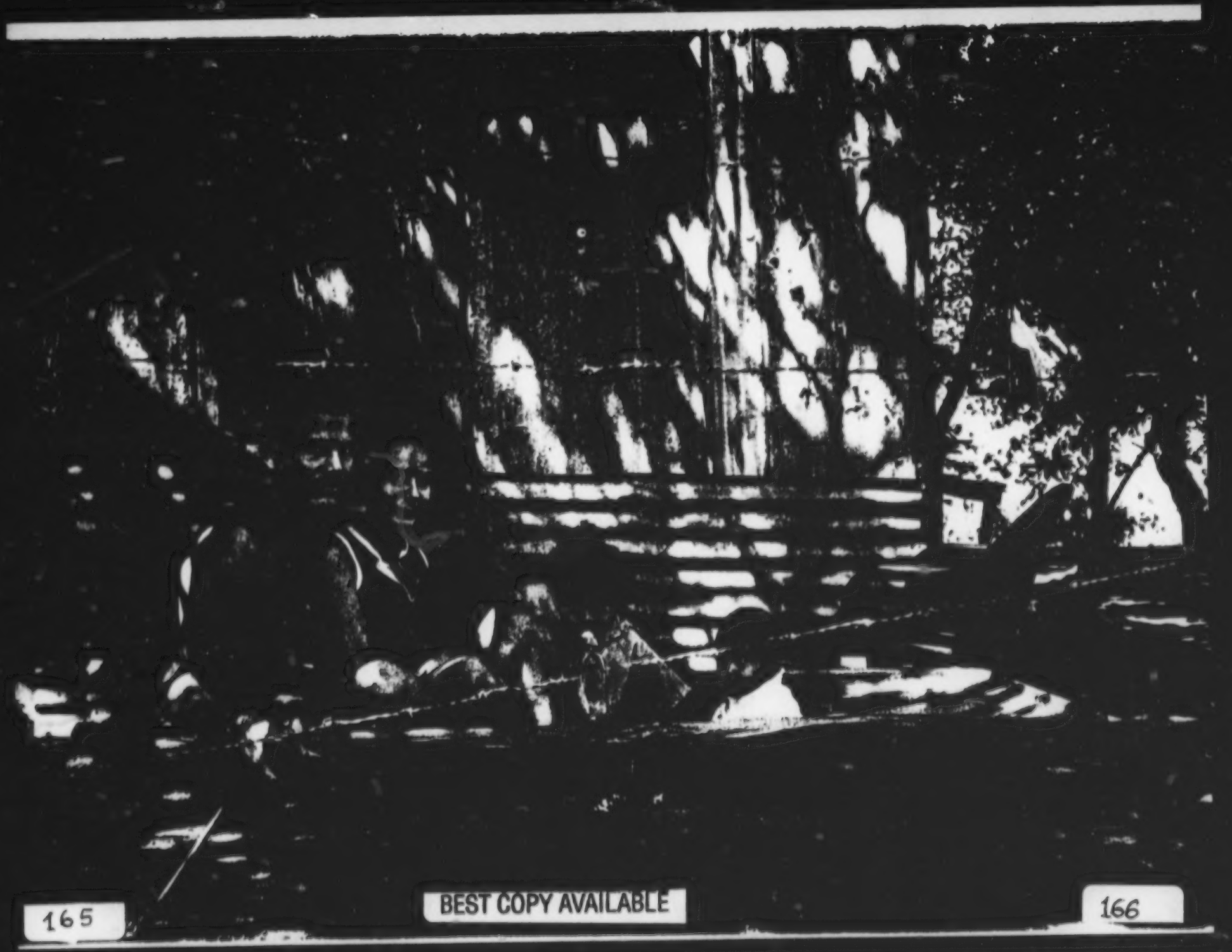
We know we have something good here. I know it because my eldest children didn't have it and my youngest children do. And that's the motivation: supporting this to keep it all going.

I was very surprised and proud when I was elected. I was very nervous too but the other members helped me. The educators did too.

At the start, in the first days, we had meetings and we talked about our worries. We didn't have much confidence because we didn't have any experience.

We asked ourselves 'What do we know about what should be going on here?'

When they wanted to elect me President of the Committee I said 'Ask someone else!' I didn't even know what the President was supposed to do. But nor did anyone else. They insisted and finally I said 'OK. But you must all help me'.



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Nicaragua: *this family positively radiated its joy and the children were so secure, busy and happy*
Photo: Jim Smale

The parents then reflected on what they had learned together.

We've learned that you have to be practical. Find practical things to concentrate on. You build on your success in doing practical things. You learn as you go, you get better, you get more confidence, you take on more.

This is how it works. Maybe we are going to have a discussion with parents – perhaps about how things are in the school. Or if there are problems, about what needs to be done. Then we work out what the discussion has to cover. We work out how we will run the discussion too. Then we work out who will play which roles and how they will do that. For example, I have some roles as President, so we work those out.

We get a lot of parents at those meetings and I still get frightened when I stand up in front of them.

Getting them to come to meetings sometimes means you have to convince them. And there are some who are not interested. But usually it's because they have too many problems and too much else to do.

They are busy with their lives – just keeping going. You have to understand what they are doing with their time. You have to respect that so you can make it possible for them to be at meetings.

But when you show them how important it is, they can often find the extra energy.

We've learned that you have to take the initiative. Explain things to them, listen to them, make them feel part of everything.

You also have to make them feel that it's important that they are there. They might not feel important themselves.

Make them feel welcome too.

Do things with people, make things possible for them. Don't have too much going on, don't overload them.

The library's a good example. It works well: no one has time to do it by themselves but we have a rota, everyone can do a short time. That way it's always open when it's needed.

What we learned is that parents – especially mothers – are their children's first educators. So we've been helping parents to understand how important they are: they spend more time with their children than anyone else does.

We make sure they get the information they need ... helping the educators develop ideas and materials for use in the home: songs, activities and games. There's a theme and we help to work out how to make lessons around it for the home.

It's adding to what the educators do in the centre.

But you have to start by encouraging the parents to give their children the time that they need.

And if there are problems – like children not going to school – we can go and see what the problem is. Remind the parents how important the preschool is.

Now, with so many positive achievements behind them, these parents are considering how their roles should develop in the future:

Making the library work was an important experience for us. If we can learn from that, we can move more into the educational side of things. We don't have the experience, we don't know how the educators handle 25 children at a time. But it would be good to find ways to participate.

We need to know how to participate in the classrooms. We shouldn't assume that the educational work with the children is just for the educators. As parents, we have an obligation to do more than just clean the centre.

I've learned to learn and I've learned to take responsibility. And I'm surprised at what I can do.

Everyone of us can do something and together we can already do a lot.

The commitment of these parents, coupled with the support of CANTERA and the positive attitudes of the principal and the educators, has enabled them to develop important roles in the effective operation of the Los Cumiches Centre. But much more than this, they are not simply there to be exploited as a useful resource. Instead, they are a vivid demonstration of the grassroots, bottom-up, inclusive philosophy and environment of the centre: parental involvement is one of the natural core elements in the centre's conceptualisation, operation and development.

The basis for a national plan

This kind of understanding of where parents fit, is also seen among those who make decisions about, and organise, preschool provision in Nicaragua. Juan José Morales, National Director of Preschool Education, vigorously promotes the centrality of parents to the healthy development of their children. But he also sees that not all parents understand the importance of the early years, or know what their children need. Here he outlines a new national plan that responds to these realities.

Parents are very anxious that their children develop well but what they often mean by this is that they want them to do well in school – get higher grades; learn to write, read and count. They don't always understand the importance of the early years in children's development; and they don't always understand the importance of the activities that are essential to support that development – if their children are doing something that the parents can't find in text books, they don't think those activities are important. Play is an example: we have to show them not only how much children learn through play, but also how important it is that children do play and do learn through play. Parents shouldn't just be parents, friendly and responsible. Much more important, they should be children themselves sometimes ... so they can understand children.

We have now developed a series of publicity campaigns and a programme of activities to show parents the importance of the early years and to show them what they can do to support their children's development. The point is to increase their motivation and make supporting their children a habit.

The crucial new aspect of the programme is that it covers children from zero to six years – in other words, it is not limited to the time children spend in preschools and have educators working with them. During the first three years, the parents are not just their children's first educators, they are also their only real educators. That's the major justification for the programme.

The programme includes two workshops each month and the themes and content include psycho-motor and psycho-social development. Also included are what and how children should learn, the importance of their creativity and so on. All of this is intended to offer practical information, advice and support to parents about what they can do with their children; and it

includes a section about how to make educational materials cheaply and easily for use in the home.

At the same time we have also developed a more open curriculum for use in preschools, with the help of an adviser from Chile. This takes into account children's creativity and also all those positive attributes and characteristics that young children have, and that programmes must build on and develop. Our educators are practical people who are well prepared for the important work that they do, but this curriculum is a challenge for them as they work to help children to develop healthily in all the areas that the curriculum covers. In fact, implementing this curriculum calls for training at all levels. It also calls for full participation by parents: once children begin to attend preschool centres, the centres need the parents to take on other – complementary – roles to sustain and build on what the preschools offer.

When you look at the programme for parents and the curriculum together, you can see how important the roles of parents are.

Ideal parents in the eyes of programme coordinators

The following extracts from a discussion among preschool coordinators from the City of Managua and the Ministry of Education show the kinds of roles that programme coordinators and educators expect – indeed need – parents to play in ECD programmes. The starting point of the discussion was 'Ideal parents'.

For me, it's important that the preschool work is integrated into the community as a whole, with the parents taking responsibility for the development of their children – the parents need to be a natural part of the educational environment, like educators. We may need to support them or help them to find out what they need to know and help them to identify their special roles and fulfil them.

Bringing parents into all stages of work with children is essential: we need to build on what parents do; and we need them to build on what we do. They are closest to the children and that means that they can most easily see what children need.

The closer parents are to preschools, the more they understand and the more they can support what the preschool is trying to do.

They must be able to communicate well with their children, be loving and responsible, enablers who set examples, who help children develop values. To have children means taking responsibility for their development.

Parents must be active and effective in supporting their children – it's fundamental: they'll have a life long influence.

Conclusions

Taken as a whole, these reflections by parents, and by decision makers and coordinators, send out a clear message: that parents belong at the heart of early childhood programmes. But the reflections also provide many practical examples of the complexities of responding effectively to that message.

The 2000 Poster Competition

The annual poster competition is becoming a tradition thanks to your enthusiastic participation. Now, we invite Foundation-supported projects to continue that tradition by taking part in this year's competition.

This year your entry can be a photograph, a child's drawing, a collage or a story made up of pictures/drawings. All must show aspects of early childhood development.

The winning picture, drawing, collage or story will become the Foundation's Poster for the year 2000 and will be distributed in more than 100 countries worldwide.

Criteria:

- photographs must show young children engaged in some kind of activity, experience or interaction that illuminates early childhood;
- photographs must be sharp and clear, with good contrast between the lightest areas and the darkest;
- photographs can be in black and white or colour, prints or slides;
- photographs, drawings or collages should measure at least 9 x 13 centimetres;
- children's drawings should be made by a child within the age of 0 to 7;
- please bear in mind that we must be able to make a clear print out of a drawing or collage.

Please do not write on the backs of entries.

You can send in as many photographs, drawings and/or collages as you wish.

Each should have the following details, if these are available and appropriate for publication:
(Some details apply to photographs only, others also apply to drawings and/or collages that you might want to submit):

- the name of the photographer, or the child or children who made the drawing/collage,
- some details about the child/children who made the drawing/collage, (for example their age, where they are from, where the picture was made – at home, in a centre or within a home visiting programme, and so on);
- some details about the children and adults featured in the photographs and what they are doing;
- some details about what the drawing/collage is about;
- the context of the photograph – for example, at home, in centre, within a home visiting programme, and so on;
- the location – country, region, town/village, and so on;
- any other useful or interesting information.

The copyright of submitted materials that we use will, of course, remain with the originators, but we may wish to use them in any other Foundation publications without specific permission. You should also note that copying of all our publications is free for non commercial purposes. All will be credited with the name of the photographer (if available) or child(ren).

Because our publications are free, we are not able to make any payment for submitted materials.

Please send your contribution to Angela Ernst at the address shown on the back cover. Entries should arrive by the end of September 2000. The winning entry will be featured in the January 2001 edition of *Espacio para la Infancia* and in the February 2001 edition of *Early Childhood Matters*.

Unfortunately, we are not be able to return materials submitted, whether we use them or not.

Angela Ernst
Department of Programme
Documentation and Communication

Israel: *mothers and children together*
photo: Association for the Advancement of the Ethiopian Family and Child/Beer Sheva National Dissemination Project

The Bernard van Leer Foundation

Investing in the development of young children

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation that [illegible] to improve the prospects of young children growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage, with the objective of developing their potential to the greatest extent possible. The Foundation concentrates on children 0-7 years because research findings have demonstrated that interventions in the early years [illegible] are most effective in yielding lasting benefits to children and society.

The Foundation [illegible] its objectives through [illegible] and making [illegible] selected countries aimed at the [illegible] culturally and contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development, the sharing of knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development that primarily draws on the experiences generated by the projects that the Foundation supports, with the aim of informing and influencing [illegible] policy and practice.

The Foundation currently supports a total of approximately [illegible] projects in 40 selected countries worldwide, both developing and industrialized. Projects are implemented by project partner organizations that may be governmental or non-governmental. The lessons learned as well as the knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development, which are generated through these projects, are shared through a public-affairs programme.

The Foundation was established in 1949. Its income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist, who lived from 1883 to 1958.

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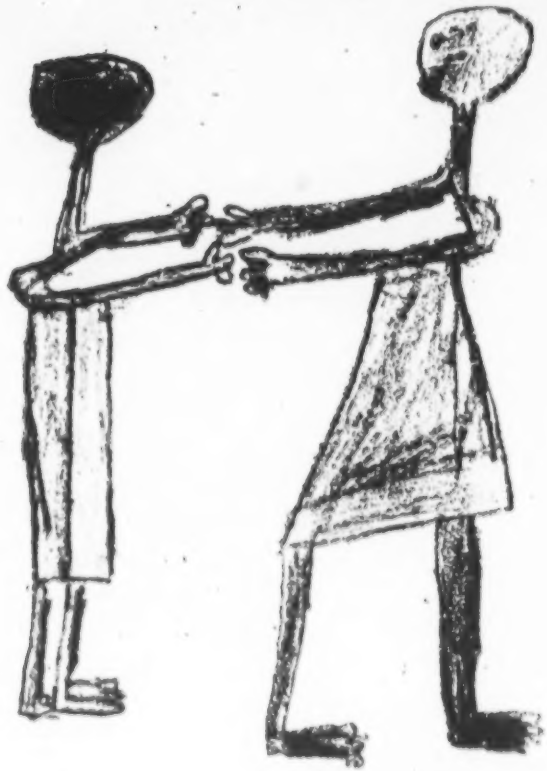

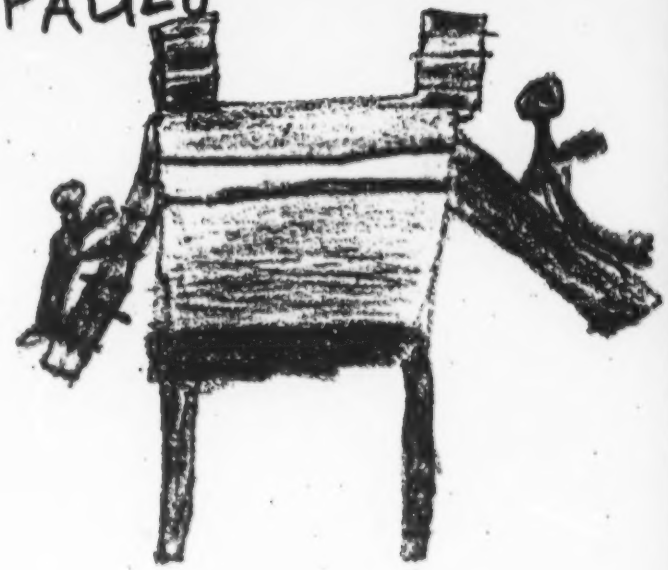

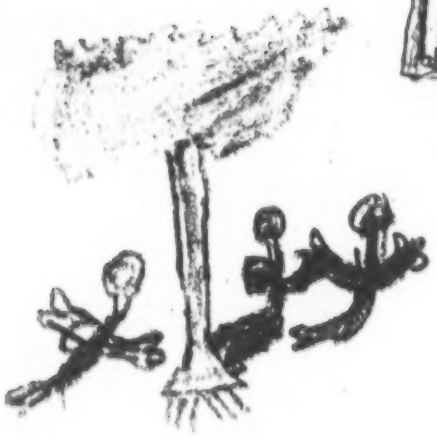

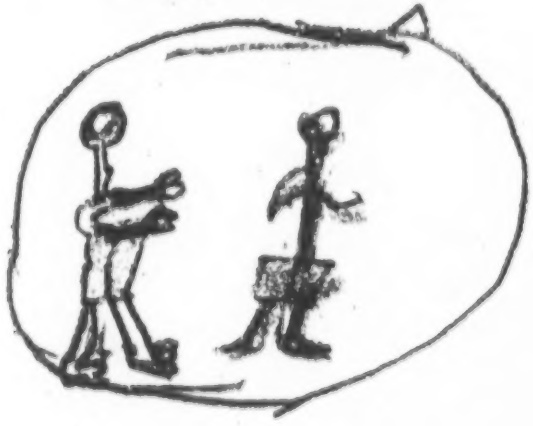

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The Effectiveness Initiative:

creating an environment for learning

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Cover: Nigeria. *Practising buying and selling with sand.* Community Child Education & Development (COMCED) **photo:** O Ibidapo

Inside front cover: Honduras. Community of La Huerta. *Diana and her brother.* Christian Children's Fund **photo:** Leonardo Yanez

As well as *Early Childhood Matters* the Foundation produces a wide range of publications about early childhood development. All are available – free of charge for single copies – to organisations or individuals interested in this field. A publications list is also available; please contact the Foundation at the addresses above and on the back cover.

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The Effectiveness Initiative

The Effectiveness Initiative (EI) is an in-depth, qualitative look at what makes ECD programmes work for the people who take part in them, and for the communities and cultures that are intended to be enriched by them. Its specific objectives are:

- to stimulate cross-site and inter-agency dialogue about effectiveness and the challenges of early childhood development (ECD) programming;
- to understand more fully the interplay between a programme's processes, activities and outcomes; and
- to map the contours of effectiveness, defining what makes a programme effective, under what conditions; what supports and what hinders a programme within a given context; and what these contours tell us about effective programming more generally.

To do this, we are exploring ten ECD programmes that represent a diversity of settings and of approaches to early childhood programming. We are engaging people from the ten sites, together with staff from international NGOs, to work in cross-site, cross-cultural teams to carry out the study; and we are using and creating tools that allow a fuller understanding of the complexities of the experiences of these programmes.

Overall, the EI is attempting to enrich an on-going dialogue about ECD programming. It is also attempting to test the application of qualitative research methods to the field of ECD, thereby giving us a better understanding of what we see, hear, feel and understand about the nature of effective programmes. There is no normative blueprint or prescribed set of methods that are applied at each of the participating sites. Our hope was that by allowing each site to develop its own set of investigative processes and resources (approaches, methodologies and tools) we would greatly enhance the possibility of gaining deep insights and understandings about each programme. However, we also hoped to be able to identify patterns across sites. To help in this, we are developing the 'EI tool kit' that includes a range of approaches, methodologies and tools. Each site can use any of these or none; and it can modify them and add others according to locally determined needs.

Our platforms for sharing and learning

Among the most valuable tools that we have are the face-to-face meetings – often workshops – that are held periodically with members of the site teams that are working in the participating programmes. These meetings enable site team members to talk about the processes that they are going through and share their learning. They also provide a platform for the programmes and site teams to exchange the lessons learnt at the individual sites, to share strengths and challenges, and to plan the way forward in relation to the EI's set objectives.

The first such meeting took the form of a workshop in June 1999, in The Hague. It included members from each of the ten site teams. They learned more about the goals and purposes of the EI, and about who was involved. They also shared what they hoped to be able to do within the EI and what they anticipated getting out of it. At the end of the workshop they produced action plans that detailed their specific activities for the remainder of the year.

The second such meeting was for the site team members from Latin America programmes. It was held in Guatemala and hosted by Redd Barna. The purpose was to provide an update of EI activities

India: *Engrossed*
photo: Liana Gertsch

within the programmes in Peru, Colombia and Honduras, share the tools used at different sites, share experience to date, make plans for the future, and define the nature of activities to be presented at an EI conference in November 1999.

This EI conference was held in The Hague and formed part of the Bernard van Leer Foundation's 50th anniversary celebrations. This conference allowed 15 members of the 10 EI site teams to share their experiences to date with a carefully selected target audience: 25 early childhood policy-makers and planners from universities, foundations, and donor and government agencies.

This year, the implementation of the EI has continued across the 10 sites and, in parallel, dissemination has begun. The first major collective activity was a workshop in Porto, Portugal. This was an opportunity for all the site teams to share ideas and experiences on qualitative tools and methods for data gathering and analysis; to learn about different/creative forms of communication in order to present their findings effectively to different audiences; and to develop concrete ways to apply what they are learning from the EI to programmes.

One of the direct outcomes of the workshop in Portugal is planning for very focused meetings to consolidate what is being learnt at the different sites, and the lessons that can be drawn across the sites. The nature of these meetings is described in detail on page 14. In harness with this, innovative communication strategies are being introduced or developed for the creation of products and activities that share the EI's insights and learning with all of its audiences. At the same time, a methodology of learning is also being developed to define processes for the integration of qualitative research into ECD programming.

This edition of *Early Childhood Matters* features articles about many aspects of the first 18 months of the operation of the EI. However, none of them should be read in isolation: each of them reflects the ethos of the EI, and the nature of the processes that the EI is continuously developing. The first article is by Babeth Lefur and provides an overview of what has been experienced and achieved, with an analysis of some areas that have proved to be especially significant (page 5). She follows this with an example of how differing viewpoints can be organised and considered so that they reveal such tangibles as implications for programming (page 14). Leonardo Yánez then offers his reflections about the dynamics, realities and processes of the EI so far, and also discusses some of the EI's initial findings (page 17). Next Tom Lent offers a thorough exploration of facilitating participative workshops. This is more than a technical review of such workshops, it is also a review of the participative processes themselves that highlights their centrality to the EI (page 27). Finally, Angela Ernst shows why and how photographs and other graphic media (tools being used in the EI to tell the projects' stories) can successfully convey ideas and information that cannot otherwise be readily communicated (page 38).

Together, these articles give a strong sense of what the EI is trying to achieve, show how it is working in practice, and – in terms of investigative processes and resources – reveal some of its first findings. We conceived the EI as open and transparent, sharing assumptions, confusions and findings as we moved along, and we are doing this. We expected to make mistakes and we expected to be surprised, and our expectations have been proved correct. We also stated early on that we were open to changes in direction, and we have indeed made changes.

The EI Coordinating Team

The processes of generating knowledge

Babeth Ngọc Hân Lefur
Member of the EI Coordinating Team

As the introduction to this edition of *Early Childhood Matters* makes clear, the Effectiveness Initiative (EI) is about enabling each of the participating projects to examine themselves, in the ways that they find appropriate within the framework of the EI. The point is to discover what has contributed to success in their work, and what has hindered success. In practice this means:

1. That there is a team working on site with each project that directs investigations, carries them out, and does the internal analysis of both the processes used in the investigations, and the outcomes. This team is made up partly of people from within the project, and partly of outsiders.
2. That each project and its site team determine what will be investigated.
3. That, partly drawing on a body of tools and processes identified or developed for the EI, and partly discovering or inventing new tools and processes, each project and its site team determine how investigations are carried out.
4. That each project and its site team discuss, analyse and document both the processes and the outcomes of the investigations.
5. That everything is shared, analysed and discussed with all the other participating projects and site teams.
6. That lessons are being learned across sites that have implications for ECD programming and policy development.

The whole of the EI is given coherence and kept on track by a Coordinating Team (CT); by regular participative workshops (as described in the introduction) involving the site teams and the CT; by interactions with an Advisory Committee (see page 11); and by direct communications that circulate among all those involved.

This article is about what has come out of the first 18 months of the EI. So far, much of our learning is following two parallel tracks: 1) learning about the processes within site teams, across the sites, and between the sites and the coordinating team; and 2) learning about the ethics and practicalities of doing participatory action research within an international ECD context. This article focuses on the first of these tracks and is organised in three sections: the EI research process so far; the communication challenge: enabling dialogues; and reflections and next steps. This second track is covered in the article on page 17.

The EI research process so far

We have known from the beginning that we are unlikely to arrive at a single definition or understanding of effectiveness. After all, projects are devised, developed and operated by more or less fluid groups of human beings, with and for other human beings, over many years, in a wide variety of evolving and shifting contexts and circumstances. This reality determines many operational aspects of the EI. For example, in order to bring multiple perspectives to the EI, there are 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in each site team. To maximise the diversity, there is a great deal of analysis of, and discussion about, the information and experiences that are interchanged between sites. To represent the multiple realities that we expected to uncover, in ways that showed their dynamism, we

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India. Concentration
photo Liana Gertsch

avoided using a prescribed set of tools and procedures uniformly across all of the sites. Instead, each project and its site team chose research tools that were relevant to the context, added more as necessary, and frequently developed or invented new ones.

The advantage of starting without a normative blueprint is the flexibility that the site teams have in carrying out their investigations: they can adapt what they are doing; their procedures can evolve hand in hand with the research focus; and they can bring in new tools. This open approach has resulted in the adoption or development of a wide range of tools and methodologies, from the conventional to the most creative and innovative. The graphic alongside offers a selection.

Gathering data

the river analogy

During an early exercise, a river analogy was used to graphically represent the course of a project's development. Like a stream, a project has a course or direction, and it is influenced by many things as it flows from what was its source – the original idea – to the ocean – its final expression. It impacts on the people, circumstances and events that it encounters along the way, and it is affected by those people, circumstances and events as well. The river is also greatly influenced by the time and contexts through which it flows.

This analogy has become a tool for site teams to map the influences on their project over time, in a very visual and creative way. The use of this tool varies according to the way people want to tell their story. Sometimes individual stories are expressed as separate rivers and are then compared in order to draw together a broader picture. Sometimes a consensus is sought and one river is mapped to tell the story of the whole project.

In all instances the act of creating the river has stimulated lively discussion about key events and the major influences on and outcomes of the projects. It has helped those working with the projects to gain a much deeper level of understanding about the dynamics within their projects, and has stimulated discussions that would not have arisen if more standardised instruments such as interviews and questionnaires had been applied.

Using PLA tools

The EI site teams are using some tools that are associated with Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). PLA evolved from a methodology that began in the 1970s called RA (Rapid Appraisal). This

drew on participatory research, applied anthropology and field research and was a way of gaining a timely, relevant and cost effective assessment of conditions within a community to help the design of rural development projects. Later forms were known as RRA (Rapid Rural Appraisal) and, while local communities could take part, the technique was really for the use of outsiders who came and gathered information, then took it away to design what they saw as an appropriate project.

Over time, more and more control of the process was shifted to the community and it then became known as PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal). More recently, as there has been a shift from simply using the technique as a diagnostic tool, to using it in actually developing projects with community participation, it has become known as PLA (Participatory Learning and Action). When it is done well, those from outside the community come as learners, convenors, catalysts, and facilitators of the community's definition of needs. Then they work with the community to design a plan of action to meet those needs.

Within PLA, various methods are used to assist communities in telling their own story. These methods come primarily from social anthropology. They include a mapping of the community (housing, health facilities, schools, religious centres, water sources, etc), focus groups, semi-structured interviews, diagrams and pictures, timelines (local history, seasonal diagramming), matrices, ranking of variables, as well as direct observation. The time frame for carrying out these activities varies, but the process is most commonly carried out in one to three weeks. The best results are achieved when a multi-disciplinary team is created, with each individual bringing a different perspective to the study.

A key to successful use of the technique is the personal behaviour and attitudes of the team members. This includes the ability to be self-critical and to learn from mistakes. It requires respecting the people one is working with, and having confidence in their ability to undertake the task. It involves sitting with and listening to others, not lecturing. It involves 'handing over the stick' to community members who become the main teachers and analysts. The ultimate goal is to set out the insider's perspective on the community and to understand the community as a whole. The process can be enjoyable for all involved, and it can yield useful information.

PLA also contains the overarching idea that the research will lead to action. What this means is that, at the community level, the learning process needs to lead to an action plan. This requires follow up processes by the researchers: they have a responsibility *vis-à-vis* the local participants.

Within the Effectiveness Initiative, the site team in the Philippines is using the following PLA tools as it focuses on parent-child interaction and childrearing practices, within communities affected by the eruption of Mount Pinatubo.

A time-use chart and journal
Because many people within the community have not had the opportunity to develop literacy skills, it is easier for them to talk about their experiences and represent them through drawings and symbols. For example, community members created time-use charts, filling them in with pictures or symbols. The patterns in these daily time-use charts, and information from journals, documentation of individual interviews and focus group discussions, were analysed with the people from whom the data had been collected. The findings that emerged were discussed during parent group workshops. The time-use tools were also used to look into gender socialisation of children and roles of mothers and fathers as caregivers; and they are often complemented by interviews with individual parents and children in their homes, and focus group discussions within the home-based, parent education programme.

Timelines – drawings and interviews with the children and community leaders
Two distinct groups are involved: the elder people and the older children. The initial focus was to place the people's experience of resettlement on a timeline. In doing so, the elders and the older children could recall life before the eruption and compare that with the early years of life in the resettlement areas. This allowed the site team to

document the events (which essentially serve as a part of documentation of the history of the communities' 'new' villages) from the point of view of adults and from the point of view of the children who were much younger when the volcano erupted. Eventually the timelines will also be used to delve deeper into the differentiated responses and changes in the interaction between the children and adults in the community. The site team will also refer to the anecdotal records from the initial years of the project, and these can be compared with the more recent discussions and timelines.

Family books

Interviews, photos, drawings by children and parents are the materials that will go into a book that describes their day to day lives. This activity also reveals details about childrearing practices and gender socialisation. In the coming two years, the plan is to work on books with as many of the participating families as possible. In the end, the different communities will have a collection of family books they can also share with each other and which, in effect, will serve as a community library about their lives as families.

The above examples – including those specific to PLA – illustrate only a few of the multiple tools, strategies and methodologies that are used by each site team to map effectiveness. What is striking in this is that sites have begun by using their own tools, methods, capacities and processes. Subsequently they interacted with other site teams to inform, improve and open the path to new, invented or reinvented processes. And, very interestingly, what we have discovered as this has been happening, is that the process of investigating effectiveness is actually making people more aware of what they are doing within their programme and challenging them to do things in different ways.

Organising and making sense of data

Gathering data is, of course, just one step. Handling that data in ways that do justice to its contexts and acknowledge its potential richness is a more complex task. For example, in Colombia, the PROMESA site team is mapping the perspectives of different groups of people about effectiveness, using interviews to gather the data. The study team interviewed 26 people about their perceptions of what made the project effective, and about the processes and conditions that promote or work against effectiveness. This produced a mass of data that reveals the wide variety of perceptions that people have about the topic of effectiveness. It also produced a wide variety of kinds of data – direct experiences, anecdotes, opinions, judgements, reactions and so on. To begin to make sense of these data, the project and project teams organised the responses into 14 categories that help explain why the PROMESA project has been effective.

- It had effects on children.
- It had effects on mothers.
- It had effects on local promotoras.
- It had effects on families.
- It had effects on communities.
- It had effects on people in the project.
- It had effects on people in collaborating institutions.
- It had effects on the way in which institutions worked within the region.
- It brought transfer of knowledge and responsibility to communities.
- It had effects on policy at national and local levels.
- It had effects on the funders.
- It was accepted as a model to be disseminated, as useful in other settings.
- It was sustained.
- It resulted in the production of local materials.

The site team members of ALMAYA in Israel have also been experimenting with different approaches to organising and working with multiple layers of data, focusing on the relevance of non-linear thinking, structuring and understanding. Initially they set up a website (www.almaya.org.il) that helped to organise and link multiple pieces and types of data on their project. As they did so, they realised that they could also use the Talmud (the body of Jewish civil law, ceremonial law, and tradition) as another reference model.

Jewish learning over the centuries has always emphasised non-dogmatic 'give and take' and a text such as the Talmud is constantly open to examination, dissection, clarification and amplification. The design of each page reflects this creative learning style. The middle column represents the Mishnah (Jewish law as codified about 1,700 years ago). Below this is the section of the Talmud from about three centuries

Mexico: Working together - mostly
Citlalmina Project
photo: Sergio Soto

Later that comments on the Mishnah. Surrounding the middle column are notes and commentaries that have been added over the centuries by rabbis and their disciples and descendants; cross-references to other passages in the Talmud; a key to Biblical quotations; and references to other medieval Jewish law codes.

The experience of Talmud study is multi-dimensional, non-linear learning. Pairs or small groups of students delve into the page's core texts of the Mishnah and Talmud. The students then skip around the page to glean additional illumination and revelations of the other interpreters. The written texts are not read silently, but are chanted in a singsong manner, adding punctuation and texture. This information is channelled into the mutual debate as the individual participants question, reinterpret, contribute and relate. The participants, anchored in a rich dimension of time through texts spanning over 2000 years of Jewish intellectual history, continue to learn with the counsel of the past together with present and future realities.

Applying the principles of this Talmudic type of learning, and the vitality of the website, to the project and its search for its effectiveness, is offering the ALMAYA site team dynamic and contextual models for the presentation of their data and methodology. These models help to do justice to the many faceted viewpoints, to perspectives of time and to the project's complexity. At the same time, it allows the 'reader' to learn from this richness.

The communication challenge: enabling dialogues

The communication challenge is to go through all the processes that the EI necessarily demands, sharing the outcomes – that is, all the learning about process and content – along the way. This is complex, and it is hard to keep a focus on our collective goal. There is a little Zen story provides some insight into what can happen. Four monks decided to meditate silently for two weeks but, on the first day, the candle went out. The first monk said, 'Oh, no! The candle is out.' The second said, 'Aren't we supposed to stay silent?' The third asked, 'Why did you two have to break the silence?' The fourth laughed and said, 'Ha! I'm the only one who kept silent!'

The first monk was distracted by the candle going out; the second by the first monk breaking the rules; the third monk was angry with the first two; and the ego of the fourth monk made him break the rules too. All four failed because of their own immediate concerns.

This is the way many of us communicate at times: in a chain of reactions in which we lose sight of the broader purpose. Each of us puts a different weight on different elements in the way we work, share, learn and engage with others. But how well we can realise the broader goal, the common good, what it was that brought us together, depends on our ability to overcome our own bias and limitations and keep in mind that we have a collective agenda. It is in this

light that the following sections discuss what we have been learning about the complexities of the EI process itself.

The status of sites

As has been noted, the framework for the EI is broad and non-prescriptive. Each project is expected to define the dimensions it wants to investigate within the research focus, to design its own research framework, and to ask questions specific to the context in which it works. Teams began the implementation phase anywhere between June and December 1999 and all are operational in principle.

However, some have yet to find momentum: one still needs to build consensus within the team and with the newly appointed leader, while aspects of the structure and operations of another have yet to be finalised. So, people are proceeding at their own pace, not one dictated by the overall project. This makes the communication process much more complex: people have different needs and interests.

Site team composition

The work at each site is carried out by a site team, members of which work together to carry out EI activities. Each site team has at least four members and is a mix of insiders and outsiders of practitioners and researchers, of young and experienced ECD professionals, of programme and field staff. The rationale for this mix was that many different perspectives could be incorporated into the inquiry process.

This has worked. However, differences in expertise, perception and paradigm have been a major challenge to effective communication within some site teams, between site teams, and between site teams and the EI Coordinating Team in The Hague.

Team leadership and membership

Most site team leaders are outsiders, meaning that they are neither from the organisation that has responsibility for the project, nor are they project staff. The members of the site teams are mostly insiders. The idea was to keep a balance of the outside and the inside perspectives. This approach has mostly turned out to be a good strategy. However, we have experienced conflicts of interest in a few cases, most specifically when funders are team members: it is sometimes difficult for them to keep their different roles and responsibilities separate. We need to rethink the benefits of having funders as team members, given that having a funder on the team can influence the research process.

The composition and role of the Advisory Committee

The cross agency Advisory Committee (AC), created when the project began, was supposed to support project teams by being a kind of 'think tank' for the EI. Originally, the AC was composed of programmers, policy makers and practitioners from around the world. It was supposed to meet periodically as a group, and with the members of the site teams once a year to update on progress, share tools and methods, and discuss questions and issues that were arising. Over time we came to realise that the composition of the AC was not representative of the field, and that we needed to find better ways to activate communication between the sites, the AC, and among the sites. Consequently, a major change in the organisation of the AC was made at the May workshop. It shifted from a body of experts in ECD to a body of expertise that consists of all the leaders of the EI site teams who now serve as the liaison between their teams and the Coordinating Team based in The Hague. Hopefully, this will also bring the dialogues closer to the work at the sites, and ensure better communication between and among sites.

Language

There are also two kinds of language barriers. The first is that we work in only two languages (English and Spanish), yet people involved in the EI speak many different languages. The second is about the different understandings that people have of the jargon words so prevalent in all our work. While there are technical remedies to help us overcome these barriers, we have seen that people find

creative ways to communicate: simultaneous translations spring up; people ask until they understand; and discussions take place in a number of languages, but only some of the discussion is translated. The push to break down language barriers is generating many shared understandings.

So far, the main lessons to emerge about our own communication process are:

- that perspectives and perceptions don't only depend on personal and professional experience, they also depend on specific roles that people have in specific contexts;
- that the way we use language has far more important implications for the research process than our ability to speak the different languages within the group. In other words, how issues are presented and addressed is far more important than the language used;
- that in the same way that there is no one single definition of effectiveness, there is no one single reality. There will always be differences within and across cultures, so the challenge is how to become more appreciative of those differences;
- that there is the possibility of engaging in a dialogue when we are open to different perspectives, and as our perspective changes over time, we can engage in new dialogues; and
- that perhaps the greatest challenge now is to enable critical dialogues to take place with our different audiences, counterparts and partners. Our ability to do this depends on how well we can shift perspective according to where we are in time and space, and on whose realities we decide/choose to take into account.

Our collective challenge is to apply an open communication process both to ourselves within the EI group and to all our audiences in order to facilitate the free flow of information.

Reflections and next steps

The EI research process has been producing a variety of new challenges. Many of these are associated with the development of the wide range of tools and methods used to gather and analyse data; the diversity of sources of information; and the mass of data at each site that needs to be organised so that it can be managed and analysed. Key questions that have arisen and for which answers have to be found include:

- what are the ultimate goals of the data gathering and analysis processes that we have been undertaking?
- How participatory are we in the ways we interact with the participants in the process of data collection?
- What is the inter-relatedness between the participatory research process and programme intervention?
- How do we return the information to the participants and engage in the analysis process with them?
- While we are unpacking a programme's effectiveness, what do we do when we identify gaps?
- What is the overall learning, for the sites, for the Foundation, for the ECD community?

The EI has an underlying philosophy that guides its operations: no matter which approaches, tools and methods we use at the individual sites, we must open ourselves up to what is really there by learning to listen better. So far we have held to this. We have also held to our commitment not to hijack people's stories and impose our own meanings on them. We have learned to resist the temptation to apply our categories to other people's words, values and meanings. Instead we have been looking for ways of producing and interpreting information in harness with the people who own the information – that is, working co-generatively. Here, it's a matter of asking ourselves two key questions: 'Who owns the stories, anecdotes, interviews once they are gathered?' and 'How do we ensure that we do not speak on behalf of the participants by assuming that we know what they mean?'

We still have to work to maintain a 'subject/subject' interaction, a dialogue between partners, and to remember that knowledge is created through an

interactive process of inquiry in which we learn to listen to each other. We need to really feel that we are all producers, managers and owners of information. But on-going dialogues are the norm now and this is a huge leap forward. Linked to this is the need to keep in mind that the EI is an action research project that is intended to lead to action. Determining appropriate action means maintaining the same participative environment that pervades the EI: the owners of the information must have a say.

In some senses the nature of the EI itself has changed – or perhaps evolved. At the beginning, the focus was on the reconstruction of the project timelines, looking at what makes projects work in terms of activities, processes and outcomes. Essentially it was about diverse participants and stakeholders taking a qualitative research approach in a variety of contexts. Now we are making the intrinsic link between participatory research and the actions of projects. Seeing how each process informs all the others, and understanding deep inquiry as an on-going dialogue, helps us to get in tune with the changing conditions and realities of people's lives. This helps us do more than simply think of development as responding to people's needs.

In practical terms, our emphasis will now be on developing a set of qualitative research strategies through the integration and validation of qualitative research processes. These will be embedded in communication activities that will help us to work consistently on research methodology and ethics, while simultaneously considering emerging issues and themes across the sites. These communication activities will include innovative ways to present all this learning to all of our audiences.

In terms of holding on to the essence of the EI, we will be staying with the integration of the experiences and knowledge from individual sites, in very open and participatory ways because this strengthens the feeling of joint ownership. Each individual, each site team and each project feels part of the process of creating and re-creating knowledge.

New Zealand: One reason why it's effective is that the children really want to be there
photo: Anau Ako Pasifika Project

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Effectiveness for whom?

During the Effectiveness Initiative Workshop in Porto, Portugal, in May, two round tables were organised to discuss 'How we are learning to define effectiveness' 'How different stakeholders see it' and 'What we are learning about it'. The following is an attempt to organise and draw lessons from some of the views that were expressed during those discussions. A selection of Original quotations from the discussions are set out in column one. The Key words from these are then identified in column two, and the Messages and implications for ECD stakeholders are set out in column three and four. The point of this kind of simple analysis is to highlight some of the lessons we have learned in the past year, without losing sight of the richness and diversity of perspectives and understandings.

Original quotations

- Effectiveness is an elusive concept; not a definition but a perception; stakeholders' perceptions of effectiveness; point of view of donor organisation is not necessarily the same as that of a child or parent.

- Sense of what people are looking at, trying to learn about, children are often the focus. I need to be interested in how children think and make sense of things.
- How serious or candid are we in our discourse about children as stakeholders? Children are important, but their influences as stakeholders are minimal.
- Debating among teams if others are saying that their programming is guided by listening to children's voices? Kids have a lot to say, but we often cut them off.

- You can be effective in general or up to a certain point. Even a good programme is not necessarily effective. Effectiveness can also regress. Think of effectiveness in four dimensions: the subjective (affection, the links between people, feelings of power, of dignity, conditions which allow a group to create its own strategies, commitment); the institutional; the material dimension (its 'field of possibilities'); and the interactive dimension, which is dynamic. Sometimes one dimension will dominate. These aspects need to be in balance.

- The idea of dimensions to describe effectiveness: criteria and elements when its focus is clearly on the child and the family and they are an active part of the action – this is very important. When there is a real sense of participation. When it is culturally relevant. When it is flexible not only in terms of the process of the project, but also in terms of governance, and what the people working in it experience. When it has passed the pilot phase, has good coverage and demonstrated validity, and it is ready for replication in another context.

- EI is a process to discover what effectiveness is. People handle it very differently in terms of integrating the EI. For some EI is perfect to embed in their programme. Others see EI as one of the several types of research.

- EI adds resources and discussion in a wider framework. It's a stimulus. Others see EI as the possibility of revisiting a phase which has ended.
- It's a catalyst. It's a safer environment, different level of openness. EI has allowed for broader participation. In EI we are doing the terms of reference, and they are grounded in children. EI is broader than a tool; 'if all you have got is a hammer, the whole world looks like a nail' – an analogy of carpentry and architecture – it is a process about how to keep the house in shape and even improving.

- Not only 'what' and 'why' of effectiveness but also 'how'. We need to get beyond the strictly needs-based, deficit-centred training approach, to one that recognises the 'surplus' available in communities, the abundance of skills and knowledge.

Key words

- elusive concept, a perception, stakeholders' perceptions, different points of view
- children are often the focus, how children think, children as stakeholders, children are important, listening to children's voices, kids have a lot to say
- effectiveness can regress, four dimensions, strategies, commitment, balance
- criteria and elements, focus on child & family, real sense of participation, culturally relevant, process, governance, experience, passed the pilot phase, good coverage, demonstrated validity, replication in another context
- discover, integrating, embedded, research
- wider discussion, revisiting a phase, safer environment, catalyst, open, participation, grounded in children, carpentry and architecture analogy
- the 'what', the 'why', and the 'how' of effectiveness, beyond needs-based deficit-centred training approach, recognise surplus in communities, abundance of skills and knowledge

Namibia: *People as resources*
Home based project - rural communities
photo: Paula Nimpuno-Parente

Message and implications for ECD stakeholders

- different points of view
- children's perspective

- multidimensional descriptors
- criteria of effectiveness

- integrating research within programming
- generating effectiveness
- effectiveness resides in people's own abilities

- multiperspective & multidimensional character of effectiveness

- effectiveness is generated through people's experience, skills and knowledge

- people's perspectives and realities inform programming

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Honduras, Community of La Huerta. *Mothers facilitating an EI workshop by checking the analysis of the information they helped to provide.*
photo: Leonardo Yánez

Reflections on dynamics, processes and initial findings

Leonardo Yánez
Coordinator of the Effectiveness Initiative

Right from the beginning of the Effectiveness Initiative (EI), the idea was to investigate what makes an early childhood development (ECD) programme work, from as wide a variety of perspectives as possible. This article discusses some of the dynamics and processes that have helped to determine the nature of the EI's development, and offers some tentative initial findings that those processes have helped to reveal.

A great strength of the EI so far is that processes have developed naturally in ways that recognise the importance of diversity – and indeed build on it. For example, the tempo and pace of the process of negotiation, and the design of proposals and of ways to approach the programmes, have been largely determined by the particular conjunction of factors within each team. These factors include culture, background, and the ways in which people operate in their working contexts. There is no room for universality here, even though each site team departed from the same framework, and even though all site teams shared the same basic organisational structure of the initiative. Obviously such diversity is natural and right in EI terms. But it has been a major challenge for the Coordinating Team in the Hague (CT) to ensure mutual understandings between and across site teams.

The direction that the EI has taken shows how it has been influenced by certain dynamics. These include those that have developed between individual and group initiatives on the one hand, and the creation of a kind of EI family or community on the other. Such dynamics present opportunities as well as risks. For example, the development of an EI family or community speeds up the process of communication among the teams that work on site to investigate the projects taking part in the EI. But as it does this, there is a danger that it may develop and work with its own jargon.

That makes it exclusive: only insiders can contribute and new players find it hard to enter and participate. Similarly, the sense of being a family or community could

make us forget the importance of preserving the uniqueness of each programme and its context. Each site is a special case and generalising could mean sacrificing a great deal of relevant information.

The most recent international EI workshop, held in Porto, Portugal in May of this year, reflected these dynamics very clearly. On the one hand, most participants were left with the feeling that working together on the EI has created a kind of family spirit. This was shown in their desire to maintain continuity among EI participants, by their support for exchanges among site teams, and by their resistance to bringing external consultants into the EI.

On the other hand, among the site teams there were divergent aspirations in terms of the support they require, in terms of the role of the EI workshops, and in terms of what they wanted from the CT. They emphasised the importance of maintaining the richness of the body of work around each site, thereby countering a move towards consensus and the creation of a synthesis of the EI in some kind of final unifying product.

Relative realities

Another example of how the EI has developed naturally can be found in the variety of approaches that each site team chose in order to guarantee its own right mix of insider and outsider perspectives. For example, membership of each site team is restricted to two insiders from each programme. However, the cooperative nature of the Agueda Movement (Portugal) makes this impracticable. In this case, the answer is to have one fixed participant, and one rotating participant at EI gatherings so that every member of the cooperative can take part. Similarly, in the case of SEWA (India), participation in EI meetings outside of India is a form of compensation for the EI work of SEWA members. Again, this calls for rotation of participants.

The positions of insiders are also relative when they are examined in more depth. For example, in the case of Mozambique, Peru and Colombia, the local organisations that are participating in the EI, are responsible for the programmes but don't conduct them directly – in fact, they could almost be described as 'outsiders'. That gives them special responsibilities: to faithfully represent the voices of the real insiders without editing or interpreting anything in any way that could falsify the information. It also means that the EI has to take account of the fact that the status 'insider' does not necessarily mean having the kinds of direct insights or perspectives that participants in programmes have. This blurring of distinctions means that we must reflect on the tools that are being used to learn from each stakeholder, and on the nature of the data being produced.

Beyond such specifics, each site team is generally the product of decisions and preferences that have originated from the programmes, from administrative or research institutions and from suggestions by the CT. What we really have is a kaleidoscope of site teams in which few appear to have much relation to the EI's methodological guidelines for creating site teams, and in which each team is the product of a confluence of unpredicted factors and different approaches. That makes it impossible to define a common approach to the work of the EI – but there are constants. These are: 1) that all site teams are attempting to gather many different perspectives on effectiveness, from both the participants and stakeholders; and 2) that they have guaranteed to the communities and participating organisations that what has been gathered will not merely produce abstract collections of data and ideas, it will be a source of knowledge that can be used directly to improve the programmes. But welcome though these constants may be, they do not produce unified patterns in the methodologies that the teams have chosen to work with: diversity is the norm.

A diversity of answers

It is the diversity in the site teams, the approaches, and the methodologies outlined above that give the EI so much of its richness. In moving deeper into what makes programmes effective, that diversity is helping the EI to discover much less obvious aspects of programmes that have impacted on their effectiveness. Some of these are situational, often unforeseen, unplanned and perhaps undocumented. Also, the historical or socio-cultural contexts in which programmes have developed, have been affected by the

Colombia. *The activity that the visiting official saw* (see this page)
photo: CINDE

unexpected or have benefited from serendipity. The following examples make this clear.

Spontaneous reaction to a crisis.
The Honduras programme showed its solidity in responding to Hurricane Mitch, and the work that the 'guide mothers' did was incorporated in the Christian Children's Fund's programming and in its capacity building activities. The programme reacted quickly and appropriately, and its reactions affected future programming.

A chance encounter.
Thanks to the spontaneous testimony of a high official during an unscheduled visit to the programme, the Colombian Government's resistance toward the PROMESA project diminished remarkably. He observed a member of a community using a microscope and making a precise diagnosis. This was a kind of fortuitous, completely unplanned demonstration of the programme's effectiveness, and it served as a kind of silent advocacy for the programme. Such chance encounters can be important, yet their impact is unlikely to be discussed in any manual. It is also very difficult to gather information about them: there is no format for reporting them and, without hearing the story from the official himself, we might never have heard about this key event. We still don't know how the village man would have reported the incident.

Unexpected choices.
In most early childhood programmes the mothers are the ones who take care of the children, and therefore women are generally the childcare providers in ECD programmes. But, in the beginning, the PRONOEI project in Peru boasted a majority of male animators or carers. Looking into the reasons for this situation is revealing. For example: caring for children relieved men of some of the work of looking after their land; the work carried social prestige with it; there was resistance to single women leaving the village for the necessary training; and girls were not encouraged to pursue a study. More recently, this situation has changed: more girls now go to school; there is a small payment for the work; village committees decide who gets the income, on the basis of who has the skills and knowledge; the community no longer helps male carers

with their land; the men are no longer so willing to abandon their land, and the prestige of the carers has decreased substantially.

EI gatherings as keys to process

Every imaginable variety of experience and worry is expressed during EI gatherings. Exchanging ideas and anecdotes, discussing and negotiating within and among site teams and with the CT, all these and more help to define the EI process globally. They also contribute to the redefinition of the activities of each individual site team, in their study and in the ways in which their findings are documented. Each meeting is therefore all about learning from each other and from our own learning, and about remaining flexible and adaptable.

The workshop in Porto emphasised the importance of these kinds of meetings for sharing ideas and experiences: it is clear that the search for innovative approaches in the field of programmes requires moments of shared reflection. It was also a testing of our ideas about the learning process that is the EI.

Workshop participants reiterated the importance of giving those who are most directly involved, genuine room for sharing their perspectives on what makes a programme work. But, while there was unity on the notion of participation in principle, there was considerable diversity in its implementation. For example, some teams had put a great deal of effort into developing instruments to ensure children's participation, using local, culturally relevant instruments. Others had focused on parent participation, involving them directly in the study or in planning information-gathering activities. However, interviews remain the most generally used way of quickly gaining information from people who, in some way or at some point in time, were involved in the programme. This probably reflects our own academic or field work background.

In terms of methodology, workshops are also places to analyse the collection of instruments that we call the 'EI tool kit'. Analysis centres on the extent to which the various instruments genuinely reflect the ideas and opinions of the people participating in the study. This includes the extent to which these ideas and opinions are actually affected by the characteristics of these very instruments. An example of this is a case study in which children had to present their views about their experiences of adult-child relationships in a programme. They did this directly with the person who was conducting the study, and in front of their peers. Unsurprisingly, their answers were somewhat uniform and stereotyped and it was clear that they were able to identify the 'good' answers in this context. The tool and the procedures had to be improved to enable them to express their real views. This entailed interviewing children two at a time to allow spontaneous child to child interactions to develop; allowing children to spend more time immersing themselves in the materials that enabled them to express themselves; using more open-ended questions; and recording everything that the children said, instead of reporting an edited version.

More important, the Porto workshop reminded us that we need a definition of ethical principles and of common methodologies, as we search for shared understandings about what has proved to be relevant to the success of ECD programmes. Participants engaged in an exploration of both. For example, the site team from Portugal, and before them the site teams from Mozambique and Honduras, had asked themselves what concrete benefits the EI could bring to their respective projects. The most interesting aspect of this question is that those being investigated are doing the investigation themselves. The validity of the information that is gathered is related to those who provide it and who use it to improve programme effectiveness. Site teams stressed the importance of integrating EI activities into programme planning, and of understanding the value of lessons learned in terms of the extent to which they are important to the programmes themselves. The point is to ensure that communities, instead of being worn down by abusive research that produces no apparent benefit for them, are part of that research, know what they are producing, and are seeking direct benefits from their participation. This reinforces the EI as not merely a learning project, but

also as a way to make programmes more effective.

But the principle of participatory research does not mean that teams are restricted in their search for opinions about their programmes and cannot try out methodologies that are important to them as well. Rather, it emphasises the importance of transparency and respect for all participants in the EI.

In practice, there has been considerable diversity in participation. Some of the site teams have already reached the final stages of their research and have very few resources left to work participatively with in their communities. Others had initiated the study from a methodological starting point that was not necessarily compatible with the participatory learning for action (PLA) focus (see page 7). Still others started out with a philosophy of participation. One other clear issue for the EI is that, while we share a common understanding of participation, we discuss it in terms that reflect our academic backgrounds. Our discussions often seem more like lectures that express our own models and desires, instead of focusing on the models or desires of different people involved in a programme. In our exploration of the ethical and methodological characteristics of the EI, this is something we must bear in mind.

A final point about EI gatherings: at short notice, the workshop in Porto had to be restructured and, to some extent, refocused. This was to ensure that it properly met the needs of the participants, while ensuring that participants could benefit from the resources that had been gathered. Reading the article by Tom Lent on page 27 will show why and how this should be done. In its new form, the workshop provided room for reflection on ethical and methodological issues and for interaction amongst site teams by establishing working groups around specific themes. These themes were: Effectiveness; Sustainability; Policy and Advocacy; Capacity Building; the EI Tool Kit; and Communication. To ensure integration, the CT now acts as an interlocutor to channel questions and explore possible future actions. Close contact between the CT and the individual teams has always been seen as essential to the CT. Now this contact also ensures that planning for future meetings is fed by local/site team needs; and it will ensure that there is always room to continue exploring and understanding lessons learnt on a global level. Hopefully, the CT will achieve this by sustaining and further reinforcing contacts among the members of the CT family or community.

As we have progressed through the EI in general, certain rules have been developed. Some of these are practical and relatively straightforward. For example, rules have been developed to help site teams discover their roles and functions in their specific sites, and across the community of EI sites. These relate to the management of the EI. Other rules have been devised to help in much more complex and sensitive areas. For example, some are about the methodology of discovering what works or has worked in ECD programmes. In this area, developing common rules about methodological paths that produce justifiable statements about lessons learnt, is like walking through a minefield of ethical stances and unexpected dilemmas.

The need now is to develop the EI's structure, and work started in the Porto workshop with the formation of working groups. These working groups will operate somewhat like virtual teams that are centred on individual themes rather than on individual sites. They will continue to consider the results that have been obtained from a number of experiences by reflecting on them more broadly but within the framework of their topics. However, they are not there to substitute for, or set limits to, processes in the EI, the site teams or the participating projects – nor in the dissemination phase of the EI. Rather they will explore their themes using the material that is emerging from the ten participating sites, and circulate their work so that it can be considered and commented on. Once working groups have shown that they are viable, we hope that new themes will be introduced that are significant to the projects and that, at the same time, extend the EI's search for lessons learnt.

In addition to the working groups that will tackle individual themes, we now see the need for a kind of task force that will take a broad overview, ensuring coherence across the EI in working with data. It will consolidate the lessons that are emerging from sites and map the overall progress of the EI. Its findings will feed into the EI community, including the Coordinating Team.

To analyse the overall process of the EI and help it realise its potential as it holds to its visions, we are also working on the idea of focus group meetings. These will fulfil the functions of 'independent consultants' who validate EI outputs and demonstrate and develop their applicability to practice in the field. The first focus group meeting is about giving greater clarity to what is emerging from the operation of the EI in terms of the ethical and methodological dimensions of inclusive learning. These dimensions are associated with gathering, interpreting and communicating relevant information and materials that have been unveiled by the EI teams. Subsequent meetings will explore emerging themes from individual projects.

Initial findings ...

The point of the EI is to discover what makes an ECD programme work. EI processes are just beginning to produce a collection of lessons and reflections, and these are starting to inform team visits, the international and team meetings, and the preliminary reports. They are also sparking off more focused cross-site debates, and launching searches through the collected data that are beginning to highlight some initial findings. The most important aspect of this is to synthesise findings by using processes that make sense to the EI; and we must preserve the authenticity of these findings and avoid reducing them to some kind of generalised 'check list' by which effectiveness can be measured. The following initial findings are offered in this light.

Turnover of programme workers
The rapid turnover of programme workers that is characteristic of many ECD programmes is often seen as undesirable: programmes lose experience, skills and knowledge. But we are learning that, if changes are properly understood, they can actually be advantageous. For example, as a part of the policy of Parent Associations in Puno (Peru) the communities regularly change the animators who work with children. This means that the income that goes with the job is shared among a number of women, and that more women have the chance to learn about child development. But there are obviously implications for the programme: for example, new workers have to be trained on an on-going basis and this has to be factored into planning and budgeting.

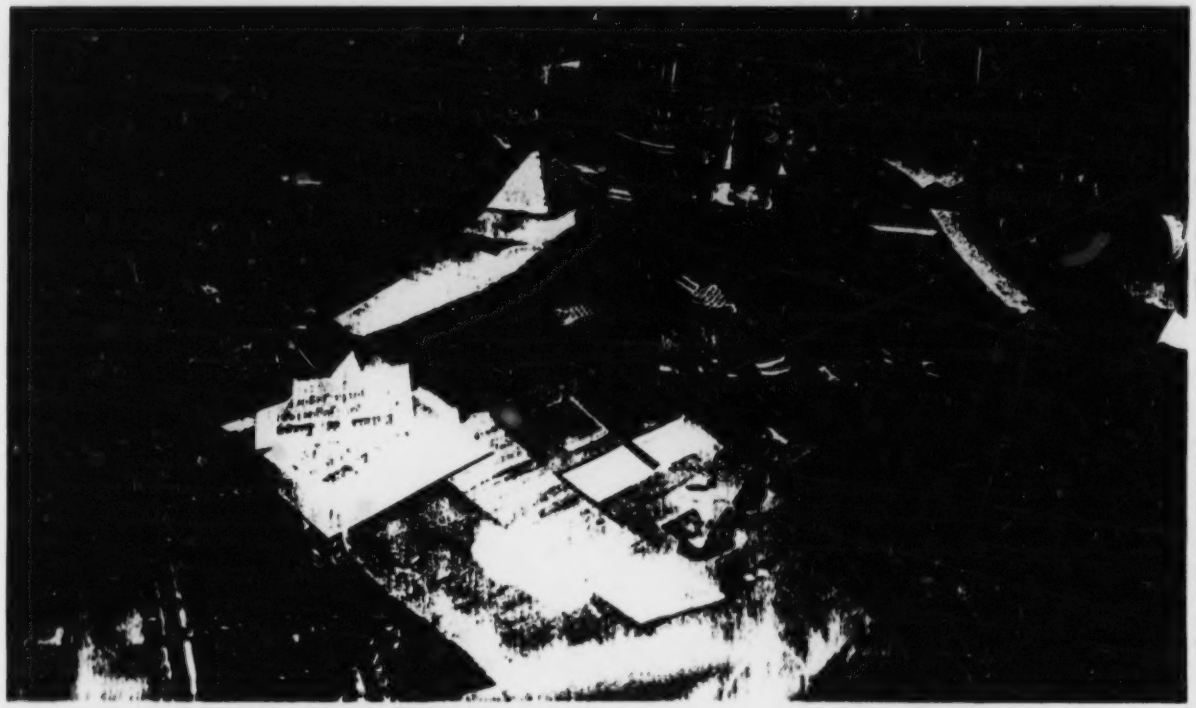
Turnover of leaders
When comparing the life of a programme to a river, changes of leadership appear as key events in its course because qualitative changes in the content and the components of the programme frequently occur at these times. We have seen that these changes are judged differently by the various stakeholders. For example, in the PROMESA (Colombia) programme, the departure of the founders created new challenges for the organisation. It was a critical time and the emergent leadership signed an agreement with a new main donor that took the programme through its crisis and ensured its continuity. However, from the point of view of the founder, the agreement was not 'the best' that could have been negotiated. Nonetheless, the river still flowed. We have learned a complementary lesson from Puno (Peru), where there was also a change in the leadership, this time as a result of a change in the funding of the dissemination phase of the pilot. The originators of the programme perceived that the quality of the programme deteriorated and the rivers that they drew tended to dry up. But the rivers drawn by the educators showed the programme growing strongly.

Planned succession
Accepting that changes will follow a change of leadership and making the best of the new situation, is one way of coping. A more radical approach is to plan for change by creating a process for succession. We have seen this in the Madrasa preschool programme in Kenya. In 1999, the woman who began the project some 16 years ago, stepped down from overall project management,

and responsibility was passed on to a woman who had been trained for the task. This mechanism for change exists throughout the programme: each position has someone in training to take over the role when the current person moves on.

Continuously adapting tools

Following on the above, we have learned that tools that help us to learn about ECD programmes have to be continuously adapted. We have also learned that these adaptations must be guided by sensitivity, knowledge and reflection. For example, the Arpillera (puppets and flannelgraph*) tool was used by the data collectors working with the PRONOEI programme in Peru. At first children were asked to use the Arpillera to express their opinions about their play centres. The tool was used in an artificial situation, and questions were asked in such a way that children responded very mechanically. Once the researchers saw that children's responses were very limited, they changed the situation and the task, although the same materials were used.



EI Workshop, The Hague: *Demonstrating SUSAN's flannelgraph technique (see page 24)*
photo: Angela Ernst

* This is a technique that enables children to express themselves readily and fully. Animals, houses, geographical features, etc. are cut from cloth. In one use of the technique, children choose the elements that they need to tell their story, and arrange them on the flannelgraph; a piece of cloth that the graphical elements stick on to easily. Elements can be moved and removed and others can be brought in, as the stories unfold.

We have also seen the need for continuous adaptation of tools from interviews by Madres Guías of other mothers in the community. Here, the design of the interview led to reports of 'failures' (for example, women who were not making the requisite number of home visits) that were embarrassing both to the person who has failed and to the person who has to report that failure. In discussing the results of the interviews it was clear that interviewers were not reporting accurately in order not to cause embarrassment. The team then developed drama techniques that identified key issues without linking these to individuals. This shows us that in describing the EI tools, we need to suggest ways that the tools might be adapted to meet local needs.

Programme design versus implementation

There is often an apparent mismatch between programme design and reality: what the programme is supposed to do, and the ways in which it is supposed to work, are not necessarily reflected in practice. We have learned that such mismatches can be identified and acknowledged, and can lead to an

adaptation of the programme. For example, in Honduras, the programme does not officially allow young women who do not have children of their own to be Madres Guías. However, it is allowed 'unofficially' with the connivance of the local supervisors. Factors such as the availability of single women and the fact that they could offer more time to the programme than women with children, led to this development. This adaptation brings practical benefits to the community: mothers and educators say that young girls who become Madres Guías defer their childbearing until later; and that they know more about motherhood than their peers. It also brings practical benefits to the programme: there is a larger pool of potential workers.

Consulting children

We are learning to consult children to learn about their ideas, opinions and feelings as one way of understanding a programme's effectiveness. This is a change from the traditional model of assessing impact on children only through measurement (their height, weight, school readiness, and so on). We are also learning that children's opinions and attitudes have to be sought and assessed in the child's natural context – isolation of children in a test setting produces artificial outcomes – and that play and drama are very powerful tools to get at children's ideas.

Personal growth

We are seeing that one of the greatest impacts of ECD programmes, and thus one of the outcomes of effective ECD programmes, is the personal and professional growth of those involved, particularly those from the community who are involved in direct service delivery. Programme workers claim that, thanks to the training received and the programme itself, they benefited in terms of social prestige, self-confidence, increased knowledge and greater understanding and ability to use technical vocabulary appropriately. These benefits have very often increased their credibility in the community and have led to their greater involvement in community affairs. These kinds of outcomes of ECD programmes need to be better documented.

The roles of women

Related to the above, we are seeing that women who have more knowledge and skills in childrearing as a result of their involvement in an ECD programme, may become important leaders in their communities. We need to learn more about the extent to which these new roles impact on traditional male/female roles within the culture. For example, while the Women's Bank of SEWA (India) is set up to make transactions with women, frequently men take the position that they must accompany the women when they go to the bank to get loans for their projects. This maintains the traditional power relationship between men and women. Another example comes from Honduras. While the Madres Guías demonstrate considerable leadership abilities in the programme, within the family they are very supportive of the way their traditional family structure divides up roles for men and women. We need to understand more about how changes that are introduced by programmes affect (or not) the traditional positions of women in their families and communities.

People as resources

The notion that people are the most important resource in ECD programmes is being strongly reinforced. In fact, people are often the only resource in many non-conventional programmes in majority world countries. Entering a crèche in India, a preschool centre in Peru, or a school in Mozambique, similarities are evident. There is an unfurnished and undecorated space full of children with little if anything in their hands, and an adult taking care of them. Some of these settings are static and cold; others are full of activity. While the physical conditions in both settings may be similar, the difference is the adult and her ability to create a supportive and stimulating setting out of the local physical and social environments.

Ideology

We are learning about the role of ideology in both stimulating the creation of a programme and in sustaining it over time. For example, the SEWA programme in India was created on Ghandian principles that are very

much alive more than 50 years after they were developed. Also, the social movement created in Portugal stimulated by the revolution in 1973 is still the motivating factor and at the core of the Agueda programmes today. In contrast, another programme created from a strong ideology, PRONOEI in Peru, has lost its ideological core. It was founded on Paulo Freire's vision of how to work with communities so that they could take control of their lives. However, the ideology was lost when the project moved from a pilot phase to national dissemination. Only the framework or form of the project was maintained. (This is quite possibly the reason the founders see the PRONOEI river running dry.) We need to learn more about the role of ideology in sustaining programmes.

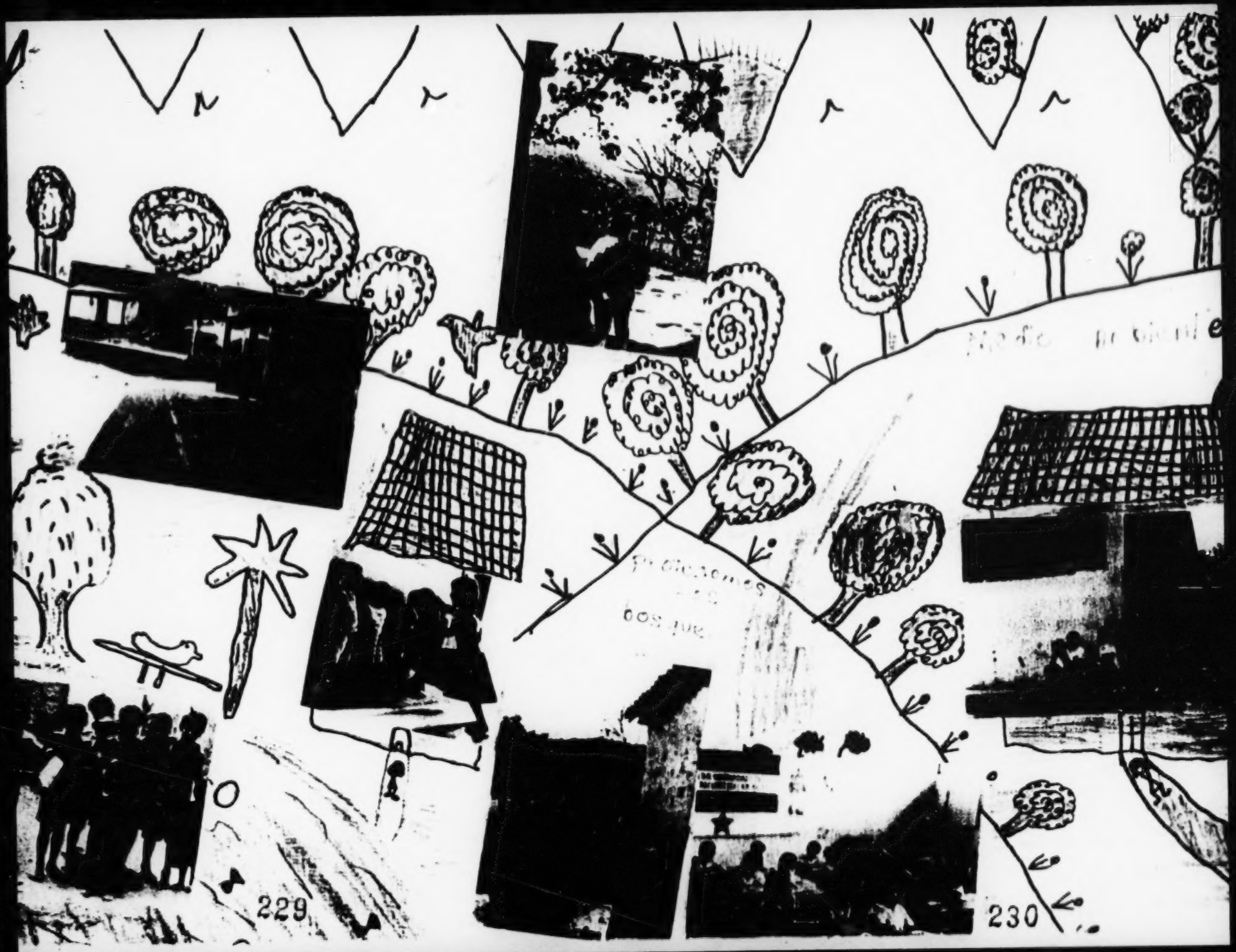
The power of the written word

We are seeing the value of using locally meaningful tools in spreading ECD messages. When new religions were introduced to Latin America, one of the main tools was the Bible. Very often one finds people who can read the 'Holy Book' and nothing else, and when things get difficult, the spiritual leader helps by reading from the Bible. Thus the 'book' has a mystique that is powerful in many contexts. An example of the power of the written word comes from Honduras where handbooks have been developed for the programme. The fact that the handbooks existed was important, and was used to good advantage during the crisis created by Hurricane Mitch. Even though they provided no direct guidance in how to respond to the devastation resulting from the hurricane, in the midst of the chaos and uncertainty of the floods, the handbooks were perceived as a solid rock of knowledge and truth, providing all the necessary answers. The use of the book helped bridge the gap in communication caused by disrupted telephone lines between the central coordination of the programme and local action.

Appropriate ECD

It is now widely recognised that effective ECD programmes must be contextually appropriate. However, we are beginning to get a real sense of what that means in practice. For example, the Madrasa preschool programme in Kenya has evolved in a way that maintained the cultural and religious expectations of their communities and their traditions. Within the programme, Muslims have been able to preserve their identity and at the same time they have been provided with a programme that promotes positive attitudes to secular education. There is now a unique and innovative curriculum that has not only integrated Islamic education with secular education but has also provided active learning methods for both religious and secular education.

Rich sources of complementary lessons about appropriate ECD programmes are emerging from the Pinatubo programme in the Philippines for the indigenous Aeta people. The Aetas have been resettled within a dominant culture following a volcanic eruption. The establishment of an ECD programme was the entry point to a broader community development initiative. In the operation of the ECD programme, a number of dilemmas arose as the Aetas chose educational objectives for their children. These reflected the Aeta lifestyle, values and culture but appeared to clash with their children's need to participate in the life of the wider community and to adjust to formal school. In response, members of the NGO have had to be wary that their own formal school experiences did not affect their ways of facilitating learning experiences for children and parents. They have also had to avoid assuming that the development and progress of the Aetas depended on their adjustment to the dominant culture. ❍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Workshops as a space for individual and collective change

Tom Lent

Tom Lent has been a facilitator of a variety of workshops for over 30 years, understanding and practising facilitation in the context of each individual's relationship with change for the better, and demonstrating his conviction that '... the work begins with us as we simply try to be the change we want to see happen in the world' (Gandhi). In this article he shows how he makes this philosophy concrete, by ensuring that workshops build on people's capacity to get from where they are now, to where they decide they have to be.

Go to the people,
love them, learn from them,
start with what they have,
build on what they know,
and when the work is finished,
they will say, of the best leaders,
we have done it ourselves.

In this quote, Lao Tsu was speaking about 'the best leaders' but it could apply to facilitators as well. Facilitation is about techniques, methodologies, tools and approaches. But more importantly, it is about applying them in a way that is coherent with our values: we want to put into practice values that lead us to a more equitable and fair world. Facilitation is also a question of politics and ethics, of power relationships, of who decides, who benefits and how. It is not about dominating, taking power, or having power over people, it is about generating and creating power among people ... the power to make a reality of an ideal.

If, because of the way we relate to a group, it moves from where it is towards its goals with its dignity, integrity and self-confidence strengthened, and its abilities and energy enhanced, then we have facilitated. But the value that our facilitation adds is mostly the result of knowing and sensing where the group is coming from, where the group is, where the group wants and needs to be, and knowing and sensing how to get there. It is more about seeing the problem solving process of the group itself, than about solving a particular problem. It is more about helping a group achieve a certain critical awareness, capacity, and confidence in itself, than about being the one who solves the problem for the group.

The broader and deeper context of facilitation

Because of the stark contrasts in the human condition, whether it be in development, early childhood development, human rights and children's rights, disaster relief, refugee and/or migration programmes, many of us working in these areas tend to see, and act in, the world in terms of the vast discrepancy between what is and

Honduras, Community of La Huerta: *A visual report of mapping exercise*
photo: Ruth Cohen

what should or could be. Our energies, actions and focus seek to move prevailing and unacceptable situations of injustice, inequity, inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and discrimination towards a better state. Of course, the great debates in such work revolve around what is 'better' and who decides? How far do we go and when do we stop? How deep or broad do we need to go in our analysis of the context and our response to it? What are the root causes of the problems? How capable are we in confronting or addressing the historical processes, structures and forces that form the problem? What are the most appropriate and intelligent roles of each of us and each of our organisations in this human dilemma? How do we become more effective as time goes on?

The point of departure of this article, and of facilitation, is that present conditions and patterns are not acceptable, inevitable or permanent discrepancies between what is and what should be. Furthermore, within these situations and dilemmas there also exists an inexhaustible wealth of human energy, capacity for good, creativity, imagination, hard work, resilience, capacity to learn, and so on. However, none of this on its own will make a big enough difference *vis-à-vis* the challenges that confront us.

Progress and innovations can be made in parts: technology, science, legislation, managerial science and administration; but people, individually and collectively must make advances as well in their collective attitudes, wisdom and relationships. We need to make progress and innovation in a new 'inwardness' and 'outwardness' that is based on respect for self and others, the spiritual commons that we all draw from, and the global commons in which we all live.

There also needs to be a thread, a glue, a unifying force, a chemistry, or synergy among all these elements and more in order to bring about the changes that we want to see in the world. There needs to be a facilitation among the elements and their relationship with the whole in order for significant changes to come about.

Some changes will come about through serendipity, accident, fortuitous events, but for the most part, the kinds of changes we seek in the world will come about through a greater and better degree of intentionality and purposefulness. That means that we need to transform ourselves, our most intimate and close relationships and our organisations, if they are to become agents and protagonists of change and transformation; and it means that we need to connect theory and practice, ethics and actions, the macro and micro, visions and steps, our life and our life project.

To see the world in a grain of sand,
and a heaven in a wildflower,
hold infinity in the palm of our hand,
and eternity in an hour.

(William Blake)

Workshops as a space for individual and collective change

We, as individuals, groups and organisations, all need our oasis, retreats, sanctuaries and sacred spaces. We need a place to be creative, to see new ways and approaches, to experience new ways of relating and relationships, to open doors and windows, to recharge our batteries and energies, to care for and energise our bodies, spirits, souls, and minds ... or to affirm our old ways and values but in a different light.

But what is often the reality of workshops? Over the past three decades, I have had the privilege of observing NGOs, community-based organisations, movements, local governments, and others in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Latin America, North America, and Europe. Without exception, workshops have been extensively used for training, capacity-building, team-building, organisational development, and individual and collective change. Indeed, a lot of frustration and comments exist about 'workshop-itus' – not to mention silly trainer techniques, and group dynamic exercises that do not energise.

On the other hand, organisations have experienced workshops that have been inspiring, exhilarating, informative, generative, and that have unleashed positive streams of confidence, creativity, and energy: 'We created a shared vision of where we want to go and clarity on how to get there.' 'We found that we had the capacities inside

the team.' 'We can change.' So what are the qualities of workshops and facilitation that seem to enable, empower, and capacitate individuals and groups, so they move on with their dignity, integrity and self-confidence strengthened, and their abilities and energy enhanced?

For one thing effective workshops contrast strongly with the authoritarian, hierarchical, exclusive, unequal, elitist, non-sustainable, oppressive, unaccountable, and discriminatory institutions and organisations that surround us. As facilitators, we try to create a workshop environment that is horizontal, participatory, inclusive, democratic, equitable, empowering, sustainable, responsive and accountable to the participants. Workshops become a space and a nucleus of change, a space to create, to see what is possible, in which we simply try to be the change we want to see happen in the world.

But how do we create such an environment, an environment of justice, fairness, listening, respect, participation and expression? How do we generate horizontal and collective leadership, and help people feel valued and appreciated? How do we ensure greater individual and group effectiveness, and help people to best learn to do things better and to do better things? In short: how can workshops bring people from where they are to where they want to be?

Some of the answers to these questions will be found in the architecture or design of what we do as facilitators; others will be found in the carpentry, or day to day, and moment to moment contributions we make. Yet others will be found in how we relate and interact with the group as human beings and the values we want to see germinate in those relationships. To illustrate this, let us look at the two stages in a workshop: its preparations and its facilitation.

Prior to the workshop: the preparations

Workshops can go wrong even before they start because of our lack of preparation or communication in logistics or workshop content, and our lack of attentiveness to

ill workshop, The Hague: *Recording information graphically*
photo: Angela Ernst

Peru: *A mother explains the drawing her workshop group has produced*
photo: SUMBI

participants' personal and professional rhythms. We facilitators can make matters worse by also ignoring significant factors around us such as national elections, school vacations, civil war, massive dismissals, natural disasters, religious holidays, important cultural or sports events, an organisational leadership crisis, a budget crisis, and so on. Yet all of these points and many more are covered in manuals about preparing a workshop well.

We can also nurture the seeds of failure by operating the workshop in a distractingly luxurious venue that sends the wrong messages back to the people who we work with, people who are denied privileges, rights, resources, and the basics of life. Yet the essentials for a venue are simple: natural light, and ventilation; enough space to sit in a circle, and to break away and do group work; plenty of wall space to put up group work, plenary work and conclusions that build up and project and reflect a sense of accomplishment; staying away from food that is rich, fatty and not nutritious; and serving fresh fruit during the breaks. In short: the location needs to nourish the mind, the spirit, the body and the soul. Better sitting in the shade of a tree than sitting in a dark, stuffy conference room in a five star hotel.

In the workshop: establishing the participative spirit

Once in the workshop, we want people to immediately feel that they are participants in, and co-responsible for, defining and creating the workshop that they want. Often people come with expectations or an image that the facilitator is an authority figure, a teacher, a director, someone who will be the expert and give the answers. Early on, we want to facilitate in such a way that people see that the authority resides in the group. Everyone teaches and everyone learns, direction is provided by the group through consensus; the participants have invaluable expertise, and the answers can be generated from the group.

It is easy to fall back in traditional patterns: show, teach, tell, direct, instruct, give answers, dictate structure, impose the rules, be the authority figure. Under another logic, this may be efficient sometimes and even justified. But remember, what is it that we want

to create? What values and practices are we trying to cultivate? We want the group to become empowered and enabled, and that takes time and intentionality. But when we opt for the easy way, we need to ask ourselves, what does this do to group integrity, discovery, self-confidence and self-management? When we make decisions for the group in the name of efficiency, what does this do to the group's capacity building process of making its own decisions?

To begin to answer these questions, we have to remember that the workshop has multiple human dimensions. These have to be acknowledged from the beginning: it is a collection of individuals where each person brings in his or her energies (positive and negative), experiences, expectations, fears and angers, hopes and dreams, with different passions and commitments to outcomes. It is a group that becomes more and more complex than the sum of its parts as all of these energies, experiences, expectations, fears and angers, hopes and dreams, passions and commitments begin to interact with each other.

Yet the outcome of the workshop may be less than the sum of its parts because the negative can dominate the positive. This is very much dependent on how well we facilitate. For example, while recognising and affirming each individual's right to his or her feelings, we also need to build a collective sense of commonality, the collective expectations, a collective energy that is positive and begins to move toward a sense of common purpose, or the development of one. Not that individual expectations are negated, rather that they are found in the construction of the common whole.

These considerations come strongly into play as workshop components are introduced: the 'icebreaker exercise' to warm people up; the 'expectations exercise' in which participants express their priority expectation of the workshop, thereby determining the content of the workshop; the 'working conditions exercise' to determine the group principles, norms, and rules of the workshop that will ensure that we can work together to reach our expectations; and the 'timetabling exercise' in which the group defines its own degree of commitment and determines its own level of energy from day to day. In each of these processes, group ownership is reinforced.

To add to this, workshop governance can be built among the participants by having the group define its own committees. These may range from a 'discipline and punctuality committee' that assures we start and end breaks and sessions on time, to an 'animation committee' that comes up with ideas to start sessions in dynamic ways, and with exercises and dynamics for low energy points in the workshop.

Similarly, evaluation by participants is vital. It should be from day to day, to channel positive and negative energy, and provide both constructive and collective ways to improve the workshop content and process in good time. Leaving evaluations to the mid point or end of a workshop can make them more an autopsy of a dead or sick process when in fact they can be a way to revitalise the energy, health and sense of direction and ownership of the group. And waiting too long can also mean that frustrations accumulate, become destructive or subversive, and show up as apathy, disengagement, boredom, resistance, and even rebellion. Day to day evaluations also mean that there is less need to work 'behind the scenes' or in 'private lobbying' – operations that can distract and dissipate energies.

Again, if we are serious about empowerment, engendering group responsibility and self-management, then we need to create authentic ways and times for the collective analysis. These are what generate the kind of

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changes that the workshop is supposed to help to bring about. That indeed means a participatory workshop that has its structures and institutions, expression and freedom, and that is a balance of the individual and collective, and so on. But it also means that facilitators have to make sure that the balance between process and content is right. It means making sure that the group doesn't lose itself in discussions on process, while it only advances slowly in content; or talk a lot about content but miss the richness and multiple perspectives of that content. Process (how we address an issue) and content (the issue itself) are not always in neat balance or proportion, but they do always go together. Time must be given to allow perspectives to develop; and, while spontaneity has its place, so does continuity and a healthy rhythm.

The power of questions

In facilitation, a good question is worth a thousand pictures. Good questions are like keys to the spirit, to the heart, and to the minds of people, organisations and groups. They unleash inhibitions, overcome repressions, open up windows, doors, and new worlds. Good facilitation is in essence the ability to ask questions that challenge a group, stimulate its imagination and open up new perspectives. Good questions touch and engage the group's core values, essence, sense of curiosity or discovery, latent concerns, searching, and key issues or problems. They can inspire people to reach to new heights from where they can see themselves and what they do in a different light, see better where they are in an issue or problem, and envision where they want to go and determine how to get there.

A specific example of a good question is 'What questions are we asking ourselves or do we want to ask ourselves about (the theme of the workshop)?' The point is to generate a lot of discussion that shows what the concerns, debates, problems and issues are surrounding the theme of the workshop. Through these we can show 'where people are' and what they are thinking, what their codes and key phrases are, what is of value, where they want to go, and so on.

Associated questions can help the group begin to create a common ground for discussion. Examples include 'Where do we want to be in (one year, five years, ten years, a generation)?' and 'What should we see happening then if we have been effective in our work?'

More fundamental questions can clarify vision and deepen analysis. For example, 'What are the values and ethics that are the basis of our work?' and 'What are the positive and negative forces, internally and externally, that influence our ability to get from where we are now to where we want to go?' The findings from the resultant discussions can be used as reference points throughout the workshop and, as later discussions deepen, can be fed back to enrich the original visions and analyses.

Clearly then, good questions are empowering – as long as the answers come from inside the group. But giving answers, and teaching as a monologue can lead to domestication, submission and dependency, and can stifle creativity and the desire to search. Therefore, facilitators do not try to provide packages of questions, answers or recipes, or a set of instructions. Each setting, each group, each time has latent questions, currents, energies, concerns, worries, hopes, negativity, and positivity. Some are easier to find than others but facilitators of change need to know how to look for, and connect to, those forces, and create connections within the group.

Ideally, the group will heighten its own capacity to better ask itself questions and to self-manage its process of discovery, group learning, and 'betterness'. Encouraging this is part of ensuring that the process is increasingly group centred, and that the facilitator is not 'on stage' and the centre of attention. It is also part of having a good rapport with the group and a lively relationship, and providing leadership when needed is not at the expense of the group's own development and capacities.

Holding the participative spirit

This is not the place to review the well-known, often almost mechanical devices that are necessary to keep workshops focused and on track. But used properly, some of these devices can reinforce real engagement and help ensure that individual and collective resources are naturally in play. One such helps people keep the content of

workshop sessions in mind by making it visible via charts that show how the workshop is developing. A second device helps people better see the broader process within the workshop and how one activity and one day links to another and builds on what comes next. This can be a chart:

	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
Process			
Content			
Results/Products			

There are many variations on this. But the key point is that all participants at all times see where they are, where they have come from, and where they are going to within the workshop process. They should know why they are doing what they are doing, how it connects to what was done previously, what it builds on, what it contributes to and what it builds towards.

A third device is to have a chart called 'Pending issues' that is left in an accessible place, and on which we write down ideas that have yet to be addressed. As we go along we can add to the list, and either address an issue when it is most relevant, or plan how and when to address it. This helps the sense that the workshop really is tackling what participants want it to.

A fourth device is to begin a session with the question 'What do we want out of this session,' and making sure everyone agrees on how much time will be given. This helps keep processes dynamic and participatory, and gives sessions a rhythm; and it's a way of supporting the self-regulation of the group while helping the facilitator to know what the substance and rhythm should be.

Facilitating progress in content and process

At the same time as using these devices and tools, we may also find ourselves playing many different roles to ensure that we help the group move the content and the process along in a participative spirit. This is a good time to clarify a common misconception and myth about process and content. They are really not dualities or polarities. Both are interlined in a very real way. The fact that a group cannot agree about

The facilitator's roles in moving the CONTENT forward are to make sure

- that we are addressing the relevant sides of the issues;
- that we are going deep enough;
- that we are going broad enough;
- that we know who has information or knowledge on the issue and that they have the appropriate time to share it;
- that we help resource people or 'experts' to adjust to the group, if they are losing people;
- that the questions we ask generate enthusiasm, creativity and touch the essence of what the group wants;
- that data and information is generated, analysed, synthesised and integrated, and that it is the basis for decisions;
- that there is evaluation and planning of next steps.

The facilitator's roles in moving the PROCESS forward are to make sure

- that everyone is participating and contributing, and feels safe to do so;
- that not one person or group dominates;
- that everyone feels they have been heard and respected;
- that people know where they are in the course of the day and week ... they seek linkages and meanings;
- that the questions we ask generate enthusiasm, creativity and touch the essence of what the group wants;
- that we develop a shared sense of responsibility for the content, process and results ... a co-responsibility for the management;
- that we predict problems and issues that may arise, diagnose the causes of the difficulties when they do arise, and mobilise sources of support and analysis to aid the planning of next steps.

process is probably a reflection of a greater disagreement on content. Good process and good content go together and the job of the facilitator is to move both ahead at the same time. The chart on the previous page gives a sense of how the facilitator enables this.

Weaving threads across sessions and linking it all together

At the end of each session, it is frequently useful to come up with conclusions or at least a synthesis or integration of the session. Some facilitators take this role on themselves, or just read back the flipchart notes/bullets and think they have synthesised. Better to ask the group first 'What are we learning?' or 'What have been the key points here and our conclusions?' or 'What was most useful and interesting, and why?' or 'How are we working together?' or 'How is the process contributing to our goals?' or 'How was our participation?' or 'What questions does this raise for our next session?'

Such questions give everyone a sense of where the workshop is, and they also provide the facilitators with key information for the 'after hours' work that is necessary to prepare for the next session or day. For this work, we start with everything we have learned from the group. We have seen the group in action, we have heard their evaluations, and we have a sense of where people are and where they want to go. Now we need to review the day's work, review all the flipcharts of the groups and plenary, and begin to see what the emerging issues are and what issues are just beneath the surface. We need to begin to see patterns and clusters of ideas and issues that the group is seeing and feeling. We need to see to what degree the workshop outline is relevant and responds to the group's expectations, as it is maturing and evolving as a group. Expectations can mature and evolve, so as the group moves forward (or not) the workshop design must be where they are and take them to where they want to go. Neither are static points.

In essence, we are recognising that the group is alive and that it is taking on a life of its own. We are establishing a living connection to it, and we are ensuring that the workshop design is alive and sensitive to the group's

Peru: *Teacher coordinators of Villa El Salvador reconstructing the history of the project using the river technique*
photo: Carmen Vasquez de Velasco

evolution: it's not just a matter of planning mechanically for the next day. To help us to do this well and to further reinforce the participative nature of the workshop, we might create a reference group or a planning and evaluation committee – in addition, not as a substitution, to the daily evaluations – and members might rotate so the responsibility and a sense of close engagement is created and shared.

It is in these ways that the continuity of the workshop is sustained – and again there are several techniques for bringing out the links, the emerging themes, the salient issues from day to day. For example, we can ask 'What sticks out in our mind about yesterday, what did we find most useful?' 'What are our key lessons learned from yesterday?' and we should go back to our workshop matrix (process, content, results) to see what we have done, and

where we are going in the day ahead of us. It is also useful for the group to ask itself questions such as 'Is this where we want to go?' and 'Will our process take us there?' or 'Are we asking ourselves the right questions today?'

One common fallacy is that it is a good idea to leave the 'action plans and next steps' – the tying together, the commitments about who will do what and when – session to the end of the workshop. In theory this is a great idea and it seems logical: it is the moment that we have been building for and when we can synthesise the previous days, and prioritise. But if we leave it late, people are most tired, are thinking about going home, have already left or are distracted by the logistics of leaving. In short, at the moment when we most need a heightened sense of focus, seriousness, and commitment, some people have already disengaged.

Several devices can be used to avoid this problem. The first is to make the point prior to, and during the workshop, of the importance of full participation through to the end because decisions and commitments will be made at that time. A second is to make conclusions and commitments to the degree possible all along the way in the workshop. In addition to a 'Pending issues' list, we also should have a 'Conclusions and next steps' list on an open flipchart that we build throughout the time we are together. A third device is to help the group to stay alert to the end by having breaks in which members can socialise, energise, get out of the workshop venue, relax, recharge batteries and refreshen. It's important to recognise that every group has its own work habits, stamina, energy level: some groups can go two weeks without a break; others fall in exhaustion in two days. A fourth device is to take the conclusions and next steps session in the morning of the last day when people are still fresh. If this is not possible, at least the last day should not be so fully packed as to squeeze everything together, leaving people lost and frustrated.

Normal winding up activities include how to cope with pending issues, and an evaluation of content and process that includes suggestions and comments. But one exercise is highly useful for seeing how far we have come in creating linkages and awareness of each other as resources. This is the 'Bazaar or market day exercise' in which people or work teams write down on individual pieces of paper each of the things they need in order to work better in the future and put into practice what they have learned in the workshop. They also write down what they can offer to other participants or groups. These 'Needs' and 'Offers' are then taped on a common wall and time is given so people can make the appropriate contact and arrangements.

At the very end, especially if people have bonded and linked and made new friendships, it is important to honour and affirm that bond and let people have their collective space to express their appreciation and goodbyes. We have done our best to build a sense of community and commitment to one another, now we do not want to ignore it. One useful exercise here is to have everyone tape a blank sheet of paper on his or her back. People then walk around and write comments/messages to everyone else on their sheets. This becomes a kind of souvenir of good memories from the workshop.

Conclusions

Facilitation is an approach to life and to relationships. It is about more fully respecting, acknowledging and appreciating the legitimacy and value of oneself and the other within diversity. It is about believing in, and bringing out the best in ourselves and others in pursuit of a better tomorrow. It is about bringing sunshine and warmth to each other and our relationships. It is about creating true and equitable partnerships, where we accompany each other in the walk through life. The ideas in this article are but experiences and discussion points, and nothing could be better than for the reader to go beyond them.

As Matsuo Bashoo (1644-1694) said in a haiku,

Do not follow the footsteps of the ancients,
look for what they looked for.

EI workshop, The Hague: *Enjoying an insight revealed by considering the project as a tree with roots, the trunk (main development) and branches*
photo: Angela Ernst

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Trinidad and Tobago: *Giving you my view of things*
photo: Servol

Look again

Documentation and communication through audio-visual media

Angela Ernst
Department of Programme Documentation and Communication

One of the objectives of the Effectiveness Initiative (EI) is to define a set of tools for multi-perspective and participatory approaches that can help provide more valuable information about what makes a programme effective. The EI workshop in Porto was about investigating and sharing techniques for data gathering and data management. Within that, one of the activities was to investigate the possibilities of alternative and creative ways of data gathering. One of these alternatives is to collect non-written information – that is, audio and/or visual materials. These can provide a rich source of information that for various reasons cannot be conveyed through writing. But one major challenge is to find out and understand what the images contain and convey. This article discusses some basic principles in working with audio and/or visual materials, and goes on to present experiences from the EI that show some of the ways in which visual materials are important in development work.

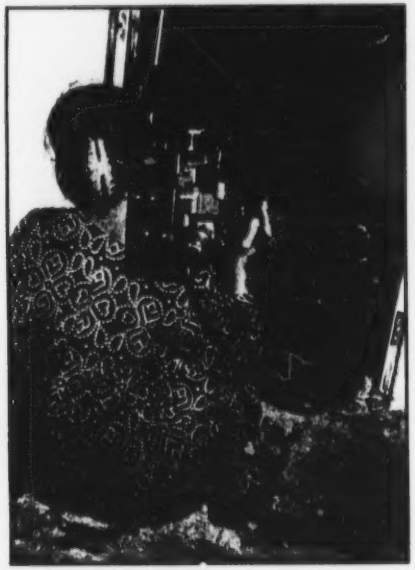
Some basic principles

The use of audio and/or visual materials is a great way to communicate with people. Photos, videos, drama, story-telling and other media, enable people to record their own knowledge and represent themselves about issues that are important to them: whether they make their own pictures, drawings, videos and so on, or whether their presentations are recorded. Precious traditions in story telling, village poetry and songs can also be saved in these ways – something that could never be achieved through writing alone.

In addition, audio and/or visual materials are more than just another way of documenting events, or of adorning written documents. In visual terms, for example, the old adage of 'a picture can say more than a thousand words' still holds true – just think of the picture of the student standing in front of the tank in Tian'anmen Square in China. A picture like this tells a strong story, conveys emotions and implants the story in hearts and minds.

In our search for ways of learning from the field in a participatory way, the use of audio and/or video materials can give those who are seldom heard (children, non-literate people and vulnerable people) a voice. It can also add to, and sometimes even alter the information we already have, creating a multi-perspective approach to issues that we want to investigate. If this is our point of departure, we should look at two sides of the use of audio and/or visual materials:

1. gathering data and information, using pictures, drawings and songs and talking about them to find out more about what people feel is important; and
2. sharing them.



India: *Non-literate working woman making a video*

In both cases, development workers may find themselves acting as facilitators and, if they do, they have a huge responsibility. It is not a matter of, for example, just taking a camera and starting to 'shoot'. Clear purposes and objectives are essential and, in development terms, this will often mean making all the necessary processes into a community-based tool. The community itself is then in a position to participate in key decisions about purposes and objectives, and ways and means, using its own knowledge of the subjects and of its audiences. And, as this is done, development workers could find themselves learning a great deal too. In addition, they may find themselves facilitating follow up processes; and they may find important roles in ensuring that those who have participated are not left to their own devices after the planning, the interviews and the talking about pictures is over. Such roles might include giving feedback on how the information is being used. Finally, the capacity building that may be necessary with the community, helps to ensure ownership and continuity.

Documenting and communicating is about selection and omission. The trick is to be clear about what those famous 'thousand words' are, and who is saying them and why: it's essential to present the intended message. But that is just the start. It is also necessary to be aware of how audio and/or visual stimuli impact on the target audiences. To do that, means knowing something about our audiences – for example: do they share the perceptions and understandings of the communicators? How do they interpret what is presented to them? When they see pictures of children, do they see a picturesque image or – as was intended – do they see the drama?

A classic example of what can go wrong concerns the efforts of western relief workers in Africa to eradicate the problem of malaria by enhancing awareness of the danger of mosquitoes. They put up big posters with a detailed image of a mosquito. To their dismay and surprise, the project failed. When they asked people in the target communities why, they replied that there was no danger because the local mosquitoes weren't as large as the ones in the posters!

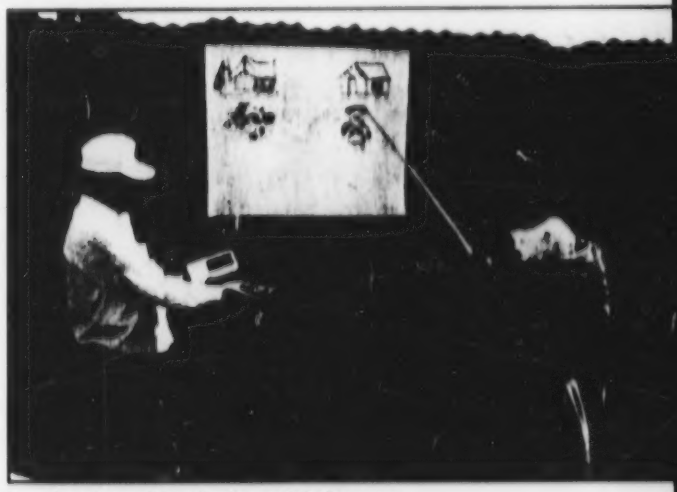
Alternatives in qualitative information and data gathering: experiences from the Effectiveness Initiative

One exercise in the EI workshop in Porto was based on the idea that pictures can tell a story. Participants formed groups, and each group selected a number of pictures from projects from around the world. They arranged these into a story without words. Other groups then looked at the selected pictures and were asked to 'read' the story.

A number of interesting things happened. The groups chose pictures at random, with no concern for the country or region they came from. Pictures were chosen because of the messages they contained and it didn't matter that scenes of children and parents or caregivers from different countries were used together. They organised the pictures in different ways – some circular, others linear. In general, the way in which pictures were selected and the way in which a story was told was different in each group. Yet each group could read the other groups' stories and sometimes could even read more than one story in the pictures. But somehow, the intended story that the group wanted to convey was always understood.

Two of the picture stories are displayed overleaf for you to 'read'. A description of the story participants wanted to convey can be found at the end of this article.

What does this exercise prove? Well, that pictures can tell a story. But did the



Peru: *A mother explains a drawing made by her group*

participants all understand the same story because they are all like-minded, working in the same field, all adults? Would a layperson see the same things in the pictures? And what would a child see? The answers to these questions are not clear and one may argue that using pictures to convey a message can be risky business – but then, so can using words.

Selective perception?

Pictures can be used very effectively as an entry point for starting a conversation and this may, quite unintentionally, lead to new and valuable discoveries. This is illustrated in the following example. In a discussion during the workshop, one of the participants showed a picture from a magazine in which children were playing on a swing and looking very happy. When he asked a girl in the community he works with what she saw, she said that the children were playing while their mother was being buried ...

Here a rather neutral subject helped a child to begin to reveal her own experiences and feelings, and to talk about them. The picture opened up the possibility of exploring what death means to her, what her real life situation is, what values are shared in her environment about death, what her relationship is with her mother, and so on. It is very likely that she would have given a similar answer if she was shown a picture of a tree. Children will try to find ways of accommodating the picture to the subject they want to talk about: selective perception. Essentially, the picture becomes a

Picture story 1

tool for gathering information that otherwise might not have surfaced by providing an opportunity for interaction.

Experiences within the EI in using and creating audio and/or visual materials

In Peru, the Wawa Wasi (Quechua for 'Children's House') project has been working with visual materials in order to gain insights into what the children think about their Wawa Wasi, their parents, the animators, and so on. For example, teachers and animators are asked to put a number of pictures into different categories (quality of childcare, childrearing, child welfare, and so on) and to discuss positive and negative aspects of these in relation to the child or the programme. In this way, it is easy to recognise what teachers and caregivers regard as positive and negative aspects of childrearing, and to view the programme through their eyes. Sometimes things that an outsider would consider as a shortcoming in fact to them is seen as something positive – and *vice versa*.

In the Mount Pinatubo programme in the Philippines, the non-literate Aeta people draw pictures about themselves and make maps of the environment in which they live. They are asked to talk about them, giving them a sense of ownership. Photographs and videos are also a part of the programme, and used as additional tools for these eager and animated storytellers. For their part, children – whether young or older – are always thrilled to see

Picture story 2

their images in these photos and videos and talk about what they were doing and who they were with. Seeing that they and their life experiences are valuable and important enough to be recorded, helps to build positive feelings about themselves and the people who are close to them.

In India, the SEWA programme is all about empowering women, and the use of video is an ideal way for them to document and communicate their realities, and what they think is important. And they are very competent at it too. The fact that most of these women are non-literate might be seen as a positive trigger that has inspired them to seek alternative and creative ways of conveying their views. More ways of using this medium in, for example, the early childhood development programme are now being explored.

A community mapping exercise

Hopefully the Porto EI workshop ignited a desire to expand the use of audio and/or visual materials in early childhood development programmes, and to use creative ways to gather information about what makes a programme work. Many photographs are taken and quite a few videos are made – and many of these are never looked at again. But if people would go back to their archives and look again, they might find a wealth of information already there!

One final thought: a picture really can say more than a thousand words: and just look at the amount of words I needed in order to say something about pictures!

Explanations of picture-stories

1) Elements that contribute positively to early childhood development (parent involvement, nutrition, health, education, programme development and research) are set in a close circle around a happy child. Elements that threaten a child's development (malnutrition, child labour, abandonment, poverty) are set on the outside of the circle.

2) This is a sequential story starting with a (dismal) situation, followed by an assessment of the problem and a discussion, a meeting with the community, planning, implementing the plan and a positive situation.

Further reading

Su Braden: *Video for development, a case study from Vietnam.*

Su Braden: *Committing photography.*

J. Collier Jr: *Visual anthropology: Photography as a research tool.*

J. Prosser (Ed.): *Image Based Research. A source book for qualitative researchers.*

Jackie Shaw and Clive Robertson: *Participatory video a practical guide to using video creatively in group development work.*

Media Network: *In her own image: films and videos empowering women for the future.*

Teaching Aids at Low Cost: *Teaching and learning with visual aids.*

Barbara Rosenstein: *The use of video for program evaluation.*

Indi Rana: *Developing a pictorial language: an experience of field testing in rural Orissa; a guide for communicators.*

Fuller details about these publications are available from the Foundation.

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Thailand, intense concentration
Refugee Camps Project

The Bernard van Leer Foundation

Investing in the development of young children

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a private foundation based in the Netherlands. It operates internationally.

The Foundation seeks to enhance opportunities for children 0-7 years growing up in circumstances of social and economic disadvantage, with the objective of developing their potential to the greatest extent possible. The Foundation concentrates on children 0-7 years because research findings have demonstrated that interventions in the early years of life are the most effective in providing lasting benefits to children and society.

The Foundation's programmes are objective-driven. They combine bold strategies called making programmes, or selected conditions aimed at developing culturally and contextually appropriate approaches to early childhood care and development, the sharing of knowledge and know-how in the domain of early childhood development that primarily derives from the experiences generated by the projects that the Foundation supports, and the aim of informing and influencing policy and practice.

The Foundation currently supports a total of approximately 150 projects in 40 selected countries worldwide, both developing and industrialised. Projects are implemented by project partner organisations that may be governmental or non governmental. The lessons learned as well as the knowledge and know how in the domain of early childhood development, which are generated through these projects, are shared through a publications programme.

The Foundation was established in 1949. Its income is derived from the bequest of Bernard van Leer, a Dutch industrialist and philanthropist, who lived from 1883 to 1958.

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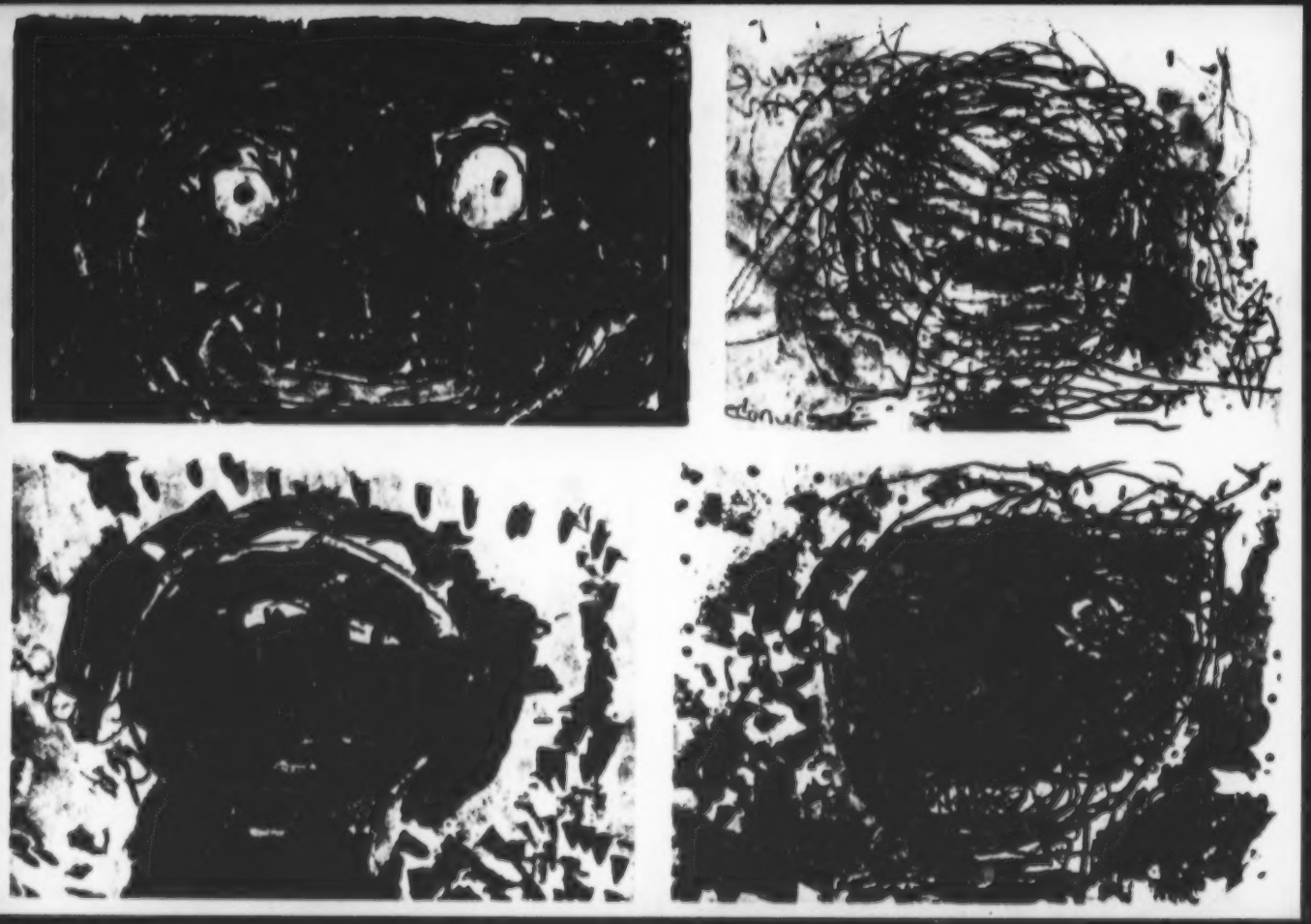

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